FELT'S STORIED PAST | CYPRIOT SCULPTURE | FURNISHINGS BY NISBET

ROTUNDA

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

volume 36:number 2
2003/2004 winter

What an unknown mariner saw in early Upper Canada

The story behind the historical paintings of Robert Irvine

WINTER 2003 / 2004

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CONTENTS

Volume 36, Number 2, Winter 2003 / 2004

FEATURES

13 **The Art of the Unknown Mariner**
Robert Irvine's observant eye captured rare views of Upper Canada in the early 1800s.
By Mary Allodi and Stephen Otto

22 **Felt's Storied Past**
From Morocco to Mongolia, for thousands of years felt has been the fabric of choice for such diverse items as hats, floor mats . . . and even portable homes.
By Edward J. Keall

30 **Furnishing Excellence**
Thomas Nisbet's superbly crafted furniture represents the best in pre-Confederation cabinetmaking.
By Ross Fox

38 **Foreign Exchanges**
Throughout the ages, artists in Cyprus have absorbed foreign aesthetic influences to create their own highly original art forms.
By Paul Denis

DEPARTMENTS

4 Explorations
Record-breaking sea scorpion; tropical research in the Arctic; crystals

7 Growing Collections
Three new paintings in the ROM's South Asia collection represent a 200-year-old local tradition from Bengal, India. By Deepali Dewan

11 Backyard Biodiversity
"Atlassers," a special breed of birdwatchers, volunteer to scour Ontario's hinterlands in search of breeding birds. By Mark Peck

45 Libris
Of dust and dreams. By Glen Ellis

47 PaleoScene
A fossil coral found in Sunridge, Ontario, has remained intact for millions of years thanks to a series of lucky breaks. By Janet Waddington

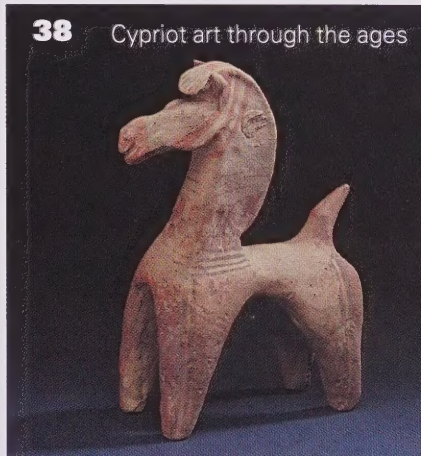
49 ROM Answers
Our reader's mysterious heirloom is just one of many stylish tea accoutrements popular during Art Deco days. By Peter Kaellgren

52 From the Archives
ROM's windows on the world. By Julia Matthews

13 Upper Canada paintings

22 Heady fabric: the allure of felt

30 Nisbet's fine furnishings


38 Cypriot art through the ages

COVER IMAGE: FRONT STREET, YORK c. 1814/16 BY ROBERT IRVINE. ROM COLLECTION

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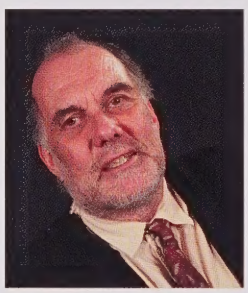

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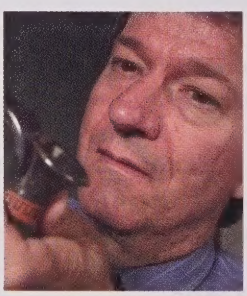

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Detail, Mummy Mask of Satdjehuty, EA 29770, acquired in 1880, purchased at Morten & Sons from the sale of the collection of Samuel Hull. © Trustees of The British Museum; courtesy AFA.

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BRIAN BOYLE, ROM

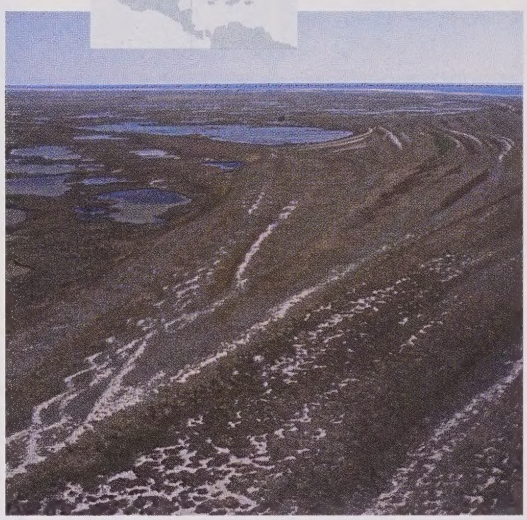
Giant of the Sea

Ancient Sea Scorpion a Record Breaker

LAST YEAR, with the help of the Louise Hawley Stone Charitable Trust, the ROM acquired a giant fossilized sea scorpion, the largest, most complete sea scorpion fossil to be displayed anywhere in the world. Named *Acutiramus macrophthalmus*, this sea scorpion lived during the Late Silurian epoch, about 420 million years ago. Fossils of this animal occur in both Ontario and New York. The ROM's specimen, discovered in upstate New York, measures more than 2 metres (7 feet) in length and is more than 90 percent complete. The group of arthropods to which this sea scorpion belongs—the pterygotid chelicerate arthropods—were among the largest that ever lived.

—Des Collins

Bottom left: Cape Henrietta Maria, looking north from the air, showing elevated beach ridges and tundra pond. Right: Dr. Jisuo Jin, ROM Research Associate (University of Western Ontario), studying rocks and fossils of the Severn River Formation, east side of Cape Henrietta Maria, July 2003.



D. RUDKIN, ROM

Cape Crusaders

Documenting Tropical Evidence in Arctic Locales

THE ABRUPT RIGHT-ANGLE bend of land marking the junction of the coastlines of Hudson Bay and James Bay is known as Cape Henrietta Maria. Named by English explorer-navigator Thomas James in 1631, this remote corner of Ontario commemorates James's sailing ship and, in turn, Queen Henrietta Maria (1606–1669), Consort of Charles I of England. Now located within the boundaries of Polar Bear Provincial Park, the exposed and windswept surface of the cape is marked by a series of narrow, sinuous gravel ridges. These raised beaches record the stepwise rebound of the land from beneath the waters of Hudson Bay in response to "unloading," as enormous volumes of glacial ice melted at the close of the last Ice Age, about 8000 years ago.

In July 2003, paleontologists from the ROM and the University of Western Ontario paid a brief flying visit to the cape. We were there, courtesy of colleagues at the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, to examine a broad expanse of flat-lying rocks exposed at low tide along its eastern flank. Between keeping careful watch for both polar bears and the rapidly rising tide, we were able to document the presence in these rocks of fossil corals and small brachiopod shells, along with low mounds built by mud-accreting microbes. The limestones and dolostones date from the Early Silurian period and represent deposits laid down in shallow lagoons and embayments of an ancient tropical sea, about 425 million years ago. We also documented very similar features in rocks of the same geological formation along the Shamattawa and Winisk rivers.

—Dave Rudkin

Serandite twin, Mont St. Hilaire.

Corundum variety ruby, Kenya.

Quartz amethyst with prehnite, Brandtberg.

BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / M50566, M50512, M50550

Crystal Splendour

The ROM Acquires Two Impressive Collections from Famed Mineral Sites

CERTAIN NAMES have a resonance all their own. To the art collector it may be Gauguin or da Vinci, to the music lover, Beethoven or Glass. To mineralogists and serious mineral collectors, Mont St. Hilaire and Tsumeb have such resonance. What these deposits have in common is what makes them meccas for mineral hounds and enthusiasts: the number of known species that are found there as well as the size and quality of the crystals. There are 346 known species to date at Mont St. Hilaire and 150 in Tsumeb, 20 of which are not found anywhere else. The ROM recently acquired two incredible collections, one from each of these famed locales.

Mont St. Hilaire without question is the best-known mineral locality in Canada. The ROM's Mont St. Hilaire collection, admired by museums around the world, was purchased from Rod and Helen Tyson of Edmonton, Alberta. Under the couple's trained eye for the aesthetic, this significant collection was built across a span of 30 years. The "Mona Lisa" of the collection is a serandite, a diamond-shaped twinned crystal of orange hue, regarded internationally as the iconic Mont St. Hilaire specimen.

Namibia has produced some of the most stunning mineral specimens known. During the 1970s and through to the mid '90s, expensive minerals from Tsumeb were available on the market, but the ROM did not then have funds allocated to acquire such material. Once the mine closed in 1996, the flow of minerals stopped. Then the Namibia collection fortuitously came up for sale, giving us the rare opportunity to make up for the past. The most stunning aspects of this collection are the wide colour variations and the unique composition of the crystals, including a ruby specimen in matrix from Kenya. This specimen is, by far, our best ruby and will find a home in the new Gem and Gold Room slated to open in December 2006.

Earth Sciences has been extremely fortunate to acquire these two mineral collections and would like to thank the generous private individuals, the Louise Hawley Stone Charitable Trust, and Canadian Cultural Properties Review Board, all of whom contributed to enable these purchases.

—Katherine Dunnell

Funerary Plaque, from a painted plaster tile in the tomb of Nebammum and Ipuky. Egyptian ca 1400 B.C.

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ROM TRAVEL

Ancient Echoes, Modern Voices

Three new paintings in the ROM's South Asia collection represent a 200-year-old painting tradition from Bengal, India, transformed in the 20th century to reflect the global culture of contemporary life.

DEEPALI DEWAN, ROM

Artist Swarno Chitrakar singing the narrative of the film *Titanic* while using the scroll as illustration at Dakshinachitra, Chennai, India, January 2003.

DEEPALI DEWAN

This past January, I attended a conference at a well-known centre of folk art in Chennai, India, where I met Swarno Chitrakar, an artist from the eastern Indian state of Bengal. Her work captured my imagination—she makes narrative scrolls that combine present-day subject matter with a traditional Bengali folk-painting style. Since the ROM has a mandate to collect both traditional forms of South Asian art and examples of artistic practice in South Asia today, I acquired three of Swarno's pieces for the ROM's South Asia collection: one of them narrates the film *Titanic* while the other two depict the events of 9/11 and the global AIDS crisis.

I was struck with how a folk-painting style almost 200 years old could be used to illustrate scenes from the contemporary world. Narrative scrolls from Bengal are called *patas* (paintings on cloth), and the artists who make them, *patuas* or *chitrakars*. The tradition of *pata* painting can be traced to c. 1800 when scrolls were used by itinerant storytellers who travelled from village to village as entertainers. The storyteller would "sing" the story, at the same time unrolling the scroll section by section, slowly revealing the illustrated version of the story.

The scrolls are made with pieces of paper or primed newspaper glued together and mounted on cloth for

BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 996.117.3

BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 996.117.7

BRIAN BOYLE, ROM

BRIAN BOYLE, ROM

Top left: Krishna and Radha, Kalighat painting, Bengal, India, 2nd half of 19th century, 27 x 45 cm, watercolour on paper. Centre left: Gentleman and Lady, Kalighat painting, Bengal, India, 2nd half of 19th century, 26 x 44 cm, watercolour on paper. Bottom left: Detail of scroll painting. Right: Narrative of *Titanic*, by Swarno Chitrakar, paint-on-paper scroll (*pata*), Bengal, India, 2002, 56 x 900 cm, mounted on cotton fabric.

durability. Early scroll paintings were dominated by religious subject matter, especially popular Hindu religious epics such as *Ramayana* and *Krishnalila*.

One of the effects of economic and social change in India in the latter half of the 19th century was the migration of people from the rural countryside to the growing urban centres in pursuit of new means of livelihood. As part of this movement, many *patua* artists migrated to the bustling city of Calcutta. Competing with recently invented photography and inexpensive, mass-produced illustrated books, *patua* artists were forced to adapt their traditional art. They began to produce single-frame images now known as "Kalighat" paintings, so called because these artists sold their works as souvenirs to religious pilgrims and tourists at the temple to the goddess Kali in Calcutta. Kalighat paintings are vividly coloured sketches on single sheets of paper, painted with broad, bold brush strokes. Unlike scrolls, they could be produced quickly and in large numbers—and sold for a modest sum. Typical subjects of Kalighat paintings were Hindu gods, Islamic rituals, and local heroes. In the rapidly changing environment of late-19th-century Calcutta, where artistic and literary revival met with Indian nationalism, Kalighat paintings also featured satirical social commentaries. The ROM has seven Kalighat paintings in its South Asia collection (see two examples far left.

A comparison of the late-19th-century Kalighat paintings and the early-21st-century scroll paintings reveals

stylistic similarities—especially the bright colours and bold brush strokes. Both forms are based on the earlier tradition of narrative scroll painting.

Beginning in the 1970s, narrative scroll paintings from Bengal began to receive increased attention as the global art market and an international clientele became interested in South Asian folk art traditions. Artists from the Midnapore district, including Swarno Chitrakar, are known for making scrolls that depict contemporary events. They responded to the new demand with scroll paintings that could speak to both a local and an international audience. The ROM's *Titanic* scroll painting is one example.

Soon after its release, the film *Titanic* was a blockbuster in India. Its epic romance set against a larger tragedy, its struggle between good and evil, and its awe-inspiring special effects reflect the kind of films produced by India's Bollywood cinema industry, the world's largest single producer of films annually. As a scroll painting in a folk art style, the narrative of the film is transformed into a localized visual form.

The scroll acquired by the ROM is divided into four major scenes. The top right-hand corner features a figure with a camera, representing the film's director, James Cameron. The first boat scene shows Rose DeWitt (Kate Winslet's character) on the left, arriving on board, as she is first seen by Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio's character) on the right. The second scene captures Rose leaning over the bow of the boat, having fled the high-society banquet, seen on the right. In the third scene, Jack takes on the role of artist (perhaps Swarno Chitrakar identifies with him?) to sketch Rose, the object of his new-found devotion; vignettes of their ensuing romance accompany this central scene. In the fourth scene we see the ocean liner after it hits the iceberg with Rose rescuing her handcuffed lover and passengers swarming the deck. The final scene shows the lovers floating in the ocean, Jack on the verge of death and about to slip into the dark waters below. At the bottom left, a figure with a camera represents, according to the artist, the media attention that surrounded the tragedy, as was evoked at the end of the film.

While the scroll painting is based on the film, it is not a reproduction of it. The "Indianization" of the characters owes something to the artist's never having seen the film. She heard the story from many people and envisioned the film through their words and possibly through advertisements. By giving all the characters dark hair and dark features, the artist has made it easier for her local audience to identify with the story.

Visually, the depiction of the boat and the banquet scene follow established conventions that can be found in earlier *pata* art. The convention of drawing the main characters in a larger size is called hierarchical scale, a visual cue to denote relative importance. The use of setting as an organizational mode is another convention in South Asian narrative art. Traditionally artists use frames to separate scenes, but here the artist has been able to use water both as the background or setting and as frames for the individual scenes. This allows the story to flow smoothly from one episode to the next; as the scroll is unrolled, the progression from scene to scene is united by the representation of the ocean.

The *patas* or narrative scroll paintings enrich the ROM's collection of South Asian folk art while preserving this ephemeral art form for future generations. Folk art and fine art must increasingly be understood together as part of a larger arena of contemporary visual practice. The acquisition of a narrative scroll of *Titanic* allows Canadian audiences to connect with a South Asian folk art style through familiar subject matter.

The *patas* from Bengal will be on view on a rotating basis in the new South Asia gallery, when it opens in December 2005.

Deepali Dewan is associate curator of South Asian Civilizations at the Royal Ontario Museum.

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A Bird in the Bush...

Volunteers are scouring Ontario's hinterlands in search of breeding birds. Their findings will contribute to a key tool in provincial conservation management.

Pine grosbeak nest and eggs—the first ever to be recorded in Ontario.

MARK PECK, ROM

EACH SPRING for the last three years, I have been busy exploring the expanded boundaries of my backyard. As part of my vacation each year I have travelled to the edges of Ontario: Cape Henrietta Maria, Rainy River, Attiwapiskat. And I am not alone. More than 1200 dedicated volunteer members of the Second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (OBBA) are exploring the different habitats of Ontario in search of the province's avian biodiversity.

Distributions and populations of bird species change constantly. The objective of any breeding bird atlas is to estimate the relative abundance and distribution of all breeding birds in a defined location during a specific period of time. In this case, the location is Ontario, and the time period is 2001 through 2005. The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas is managed by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, Bird Studies Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and Ontario Field Ornithologists. Perhaps the most amazing thing about such surveys is that volunteers do a vast majority of the work. They are an eclectic lot, professional and amateur, women and men of all ages, all working towards a common goal: a greater understanding of Ontario's bird species.

Breeding bird atlases are critical tools for conservation management. They provide baseline data for monitoring species and supply essential habitat information on all birds, including species at risk. Local and provincial governments, researchers, and educators use these data for teaching, conservation initiatives, and proper land-use planning.

The first breeding bird atlas ever published was researched in Great Britain and Ireland from 1968 to 1971.

MARK PECK

It was considered a tremendous success, and other countries around the world soon followed Britain's lead. In Ontario, the first atlas was researched from 1981 to 1985. The current atlas, which began 20 years later, is an extremely ambitious, some may suggest even daunting, project. Ontario is the second largest province in the second largest country in the world. Its habitats range from the species-rich Carolinian Forest Region of southwestern Ontario to the windswept

tundra of the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

For this atlas, Ontario has been divided into 1824 10-kilometre squares in the south and approximately 8000 squares of the same size in the north. "Atlassers" either request or are designated a square and are asked to spend at least 20 hours surveying all the major habitats, looking for breeding birds and estimating their abundance. They enter their information online via the Web or send it to the atlas office as a paper copy. All information is updated regularly and made accessible to volunteers and other interested parties via the Web site www.birdsontario.org/atlas/atlasmain.html.

Now in the third year of data gathering, most of the atlas's southern squares have been surveyed. The north, however, is still in need of considerable attention. Northern atlassing is difficult and expensive. Because road access is limited, most of the surveys are conducted along the major rivers or other sites where teams can be flown in and dropped off for a couple of weeks. In addition to the travel problems there are weather concerns, leaky tents, bears, and probably the most challenging aspect of northern fieldwork—mosquitoes and black flies. These are numerous and ubiquitous.

In the summer of 1981, my first job at the ROM was camp cook and atlasser in a remote area of northern Ontario. The following year I joined another Museum expedition, reprised my role of cook and atlasser, and headed north again, this time to the southern end of James Bay. I spent six weeks baking bread, slapping mosquitoes, and collecting data for the ROM and the OBBA. Little did I suspect that more than 20 years later I would be doing it all over again.

This spring, I packed up my gear and joined three friends and fellow atlassers—Gerry Binsfeld, railway conductor, Glenn Coady, nuclear medicine technologist and ROMLife educator, and Karl Konze, environmental consultant—in travelling to the west coast of James Bay. In early June, we left Timmins in an Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources twin otter aircraft and landed on a small sand and gravel ridge 25 kilometres north of the Swan River. Upon arrival, we hastily erected the cook tent alongside the airstrip. Yes, I volunteered for the role of cook once again! To protect ourselves from black bears and polar bears we placed our personal tents on a ridge approximately 200 metres to the west.

The James Bay coast is a rare environment in Ontario. It is one of only two locations in the province—the other is Hudson Bay—where you can get a suntan on an ocean beach. The marine and prairie-like habitats along the coast provide rich food sources and are a major migratory stopover site for waterfowl and shorebirds. (Southern James Bay is also well known in ornithology circles for its relic populations of prairie bird species.) In our area there were three major habitats: coastal gravel beach ridges with minimal vegetation; extensive sedge wetland meadows mixed with a network of small, shallow ponds; and treed beach ridges approximately 50 metres wide and one or two kilometres long. Moving away from the coast, the treed ridges change from willow thickets to mature coniferous woodlands, providing a wonderful variety of habitats for breeding birds.

During our two-week stay, we surveyed these different habitats. We were very lucky—weather conditions were excellent with only two days of rain. As well, the cold winds blowing off ice-covered James Bay kept the polar bears on the bay and the mosquitoes and blackflies in the ponds and streams.

As we worked, we could hear the ice slowly breaking up along the coast, cracking like thunder as it split. One morning we spotted two wolves running along a beach ridge, no doubt interested in the caribou and their young we had seen the previous day. Shorebirds were still migrating northward to their arctic breeding grounds. One of them, a red knot, had a small orange flag on its left leg, signifying that it had been banded six years earlier on a ROM expedition in southern Argentina.

We had arrived at the height of the breeding season. It seemed that every day brought new excitement and information. Most of the resident birds had already begun nesting and we gathered breeding data on many of them. Ducks and geese were abundant. Some species were migrating northward while others stayed to breed.

Sandhill crane young were found leaving their nests within 24 hours of hatching. Two nesting Canada geese wore neckbands that would provide information for goose researchers. Savannah sparrows, common in southern Ontario, were abundant in the sedge meadows. Yellow rails, considered a ghost species by many birders in the south, were seen and heard daily. Other species considered migrants or rare in the south were common in the sedge meadows and on the treed beach ridges. The highlight of the trip came on June 12, when we documented the nesting of bohemian waxwing and pine grosbeak—the first nest sightings for both species ever recorded in Ontario.

In total we observed 102 bird species and found breeding evidence for 75 species. We counted 115 nests of 26 different bird species, including 54 nests of savannah sparrow. Beyond the data provided to the OBBA, all nest records will also be entered into the Ontario Nest Records Scheme, a registry housed at the ROM.

To date, atlas volunteers have spent in excess of 69,000 hours in the field. They have covered more than 3400 squares and have provided breeding information on 284 species. The information will contribute greatly to the knowledge and protection of birds throughout the province. As for our group, we spent the rest of the summer continuing our atlassing closer to home and have already volunteered for northern work next year.

Mark Peck is a technician in the Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Biology and the ROM's representative for the Second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas.

The Art of the Unknown Mariner

Robert Irvine's observant eye captured rare views of Upper Canada in the early 1800s.

By Mary Allodi and Stephen Otto

Among the earliest images of Ontario are a few rare paintings by an almost unknown mariner from Scotland's Orkney Islands, Robert Irvine. From 1810/11 to 1817, Irvine sailed the Great Lakes, recording his observations of Upper Canada in a series of watercolour and oil sketches.

As a mariner, he was able to sketch at places in Upper Canada that few artists had portrayed before 1820. Even his view of York (now Toronto) was unusual. It was the seat of government, yet the site was barely noticed by artists before the War of 1812. By that year the town's population was only 700, and visitors considered its low-lying shoreline and its hundred or so scattered houses less important than Kingston and less picturesque than Niagara.

Irvine's works—depicting towns, military and fur-trading posts, shipping and ships at war, ports and naval depots, and landscapes of the newly created province—capture a young Upper Canada as its towns were developing, its widely separated settlements linked by the waterways of the Great Lakes. Irvine's acute powers of observation and close attention to detail provide valuable information for historians. Although the houses in Irvine's townscapes are painted in a few deft strokes, the views provide enough detail for individual structures to be recognizable. His correct and faithful rendering of ships' rigging allows experts to identify individual vessels by name, which has helped to date his maritime views with considerable precision. Irvine's pictures of southern Ontario during and immediately after the War of 1812 are highly valued as historical records.

KENTUCKY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

State Penitentiary of Kentucky, 1814, *detail, showing the artist at work.*

Irvine might not have been remembered at all except for the interest of Canadian cousins, who preserved his works and began the search for information about his life and works. The story begins with a second cousin, the Hon. George Crookshank (1773–1859), a well-established public official and businessman at York with whom Irvine stayed for extended periods. Crookshank and his sister Rachel (Mrs. James Macaulay) acquired 16 of Irvine's paintings (three of which are now lost); with one exception, these are the only works by the artist known at present.

Crookshank's daughter, Mrs. Catherine Heward (1829–1917), left notes on what she had heard about the "Scotch cousin," prompted by her son Stephen A. Heward (1868–1958). He recognized the historical value of Irvine's pictures and in 1905 rescued eight of the watercolours from a folding screen to which they had been glued sometime before 1840.

Over the past three decades most of Irvine's paintings have entered public collections. The ROM owned three

until recently, when the last family-owned Irvine was acquired as part of a generous bequest from Stephen's wife, Helen Heward. The work is an oil-on-paper view of Front Street, York, in 1815 in which the Crookshank house can clearly be seen.

This small painting gives us a rare first-hand picture of buildings and daily life in the town just 27 years after York was first surveyed. Only a handful of sketches pre-date Irvine's view, which provides insight into the activities in what was then a frontier town. Already there is a suggestion of prosperity about the place, with its well-appointed houses, a glimpse of flowering orchards behind a property wall, a gentleman on horseback, military defence, and lakeshore shipping.

The artist known as Robert Irvine was christened Andrew Crookshank by his ship-owning family in Stromness, Orkney, on August 14, 1792. His father, Captain Robert Crookshank, died before Andrew's fifth birthday, leaving a respectable estate. By the time Andrew was seven, his mother, Isabella Irvine, had also died, leaving Andrew and five siblings to be raised by their uncle, Hary Cruikshank (he spelled his name in a somewhat arbitrary way). A prosperous merchant and shipowner, Hary would have provided Andrew with the best local schooling—at least to the usual age of 11, and possibly longer. Young Andrew evidently showed promise; his uncle introduced him in a letter to his New Brunswick relatives as rather shy at first but at the same time "a genious," though it is not known if this referred to his art or to his general intelligence.

THE YOUNG MARINER EVIDENTLY SHOWED PROMISE; HIS UNCLE INTRODUCED HIM IN A LETTER TO RELATIVES AS RATHER SHY AT FIRST BUT AT THE SAME TIME "A GENIOUS."

Of slender build, Andrew Crookshank stood five feet nine, and was described as having a full face, brown hair, grey eyes, and a fair complexion. He inherited his father's love of the sea and when he was 16 he left home to become a mariner. Living on board ships almost continuously from 1808, the young man must have had many hours to spend at his art.

This wasn't an unusual pastime for the day. The turn of the century had seen a great flourishing of watercolour painting in Britain. Improved-quality watercolour paints were easily transportable, and the sketching tour became fashionable. Amateurs, instructed by professional artists, were inspired to record the beauties of nature on trips in the British Isles and, for the more affluent, on travels to continental Europe. Artists also accompanied diplomatic and scientific expeditions to document discoveries before photography was invented. As the British travelled the world on voyages of discovery or on military campaigns, there was a growing demand for views of foreign lands. Both professional artists and British officers (who were trained in drawing and watercolour painting for purposes of military information) had their overseas views published as attractive prints.

One of Andrew's early works—a view of the inner harbour of Malta—was copied from an etched illustration in Vivant Denon's *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte* of 1802, which was issued in English the following year. The copying of prints was a time-honoured route to self-instruction. Andrew's skilful drawing of ships shows that he was acquainted not only with the real thing, but also with classical works of marine art—a subject then much in favour among British printmakers. Apart from some unknown source of personal training, Andrew could have learned painting techniques from publications such as William Gilpin's *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (1791). Or he might have been inspired by images from George Heriot's 1807 *Travels Through the Canadas*. There is no evidence, that he copied prints of North America. In Canada he took his subjects from life, adding details to his documentary views that tell a story and bring his own personal observations to a scene.

Irvine's known works cover the years 1808 to 1817. In that relatively short time span he made marked advances in both composition and technique. The lively but awkward 1808 sketch of the brig *Mary* swamped in a storm contrasts with the highly finished and graceful view of Kingston painted in 1816. The structure of his compositions progresses from narrowly focused frontal descriptions (*Fort William, Holland Landing*), to broad aerial perspectives with foreground interest and diagonals that lead the eye into the distance (*Queenston*)—all elements found in contemporary manuals on the theory and methods of painting "Picturesque" landscapes. In his later watercolours, tonal values are skilfully controlled to convey depth and volume, and he has become familiar with such techniques as stopping-out or scratching-in, which create contrast by exposing the paper surface. He renders buildings and small figures in action with expressive ease, but continues his early habit of outlining the objects in his paintings. Individual trees

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM, SIGMUND SAMUEL TRUST, 977.290

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM, SIGMUND SAMUEL TRUST, 977.177.1

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA

Top: Queenston from the Heights, c. 1816, *watercolour, touches of gouache, gum arabic, over graphite, 30.5 x 49.0.* In the centre of the view—at the far end of town—is the large stone house of the merchant and fur trader Robert Hamilton. Built in 1791 and gutted by fire in 1815, it is shown with walls and chimneys standing, but without its distinctive high-pitched roof. Queenston was the landing place for the transfer of goods by road between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. **Centre:** The Naval and Military Depot at Holland Landing, Upper Canada, 1815, *watercolour, touches of gouache and black crayon, scratching out, over graphite, 19.2 x 29.3 cm.* This watercolour on paper, as yet unrestored, shows the damaging effects of having been glued to a folding screen for more than 60 years. **Bottom:** Leith road in a storm, the brig Mary bilged, 1808, *watercolour, 22.7 x 30.2 cm. National Archives of Canada, Peter Winkworth Collection of Canadiana/ C-150603.*

improve in appearance in his later subjects, although forests remain woolly green clusters.

Andrew first visited Canada in 1808 as an apprentice aboard the brig *Mary*, which was partly owned by his uncle. Because the Baltic trade was closed to British shipping, the *Mary* was sent to Saint John, New Brunswick, to pick up cargoes of timber. Andrew was just finishing his first season as an apprentice seaman when the *Mary* was badly damaged in a storm off Edinburgh's port at Leith. He painted a small watercolour showing the ship straining at the anchor line, with her flag flying upside down to signal distress. One wonders whether his sketch was used in evidence when the young man was drawn into the ensuing legal proceedings with the insurers. In any event, the owners won the case. After the *Mary* was repaired, Andrew continued as part of her ten-man crew, serving for a time as mate, until sometime in 1810.

It was at this point that he changed his name to Robert Irvine and left for Upper Canada. Mrs. Catherine Heward, recalled many years later that this change was in response to an unfortunate incident in which a man lost his life, though Andrew was blameless.

In Upper Canada Irvine found work on a vessel carrying supplies on the Great Lakes for the North West Company. By 1812 he had moved up in the world, becoming captain of the brig *Caledonia* owned by Angus Mackintosh of Moy (near Windsor), which carried trade goods to Sault Ste. Marie and returned with furs to Fort Erie.

Two of Irvine's early sketches date from this time. One is a view of Fort William on the Kaministiquia River, which was built between 1803 and 1812 by the North West Company after its fort at Grand Portage was found to be in American territory. Irvine's sketch must have been made in 1811, after a hipped roof was added that summer to the stone warehouse (three buildings to the left of the entry gate).

A curiously similar view of Fort William was engraved on surveyor-general Joseph Bouchette's *Map of the Provinces of Upper & Lower Canada* published in 1815. The print depicts the fort as it would have appeared in 1810 or early 1811; fewer buildings were shown than in Irvine's watercolour, and the roof had not yet been added to the stone warehouse. Bouchette left Upper Canada before this new fort was built and did not claim the view to be by his own hand. This suggests that the print is based on a sketch by another artist, possibly a lost watercolour by Robert Irvine.

Another Irvine watercolour said to have been painted at Fort William, a portrayal of a single female figure, possibly an Ojibwa, provides a detailed rendering of contemporary Native costume and artifacts. She wears red leggings, a blue broadcloth skirt, and a white blanket cloak. The tumpline across her forehead connects to a cradleboard in which she carries her infant. The cradleboard's hoop is also used as a shelf on which rests the bundled carcass of a young animal—perhaps a small deer.

INDIAN WOMAN WITH CHILD, *watercolour, 21.3 x 10.4 cm. Fort William Historical Park.*

In June 1812, war broke out between Britain and the United States, and the *Caledonia*—then in upper Lake Huron—was placed at the disposal of Captain Charles Roberts, the commandant at Fort St. Joseph. He used the ship to carry men under his command in a surprise assault against the American post at Fort Mackinac, resulting in a stunning victory for the British.

For the rest of the season, the *Caledonia* returned to merchant service. But its final voyage was later that year as it travelled from Amherstburg to Fort Erie in convoy with the British brig *Detroit*. Reaching their destination on October 8, the two ships anchored under the protection of Fort Erie's guns. Perhaps the sense of safe arrival made everyone less vigilant, but during the night an American party came alongside undetected. Irvine, wakened by commotion on the *Detroit*—the Americans' first target—roused his crew and armed himself, but was felled by a cutlass stroke as the enemy boarded the *Caledonia*. His ship was taken to Black Rock (now Buffalo) and beached under the protection of an American battery there. Irvine and his men were imprisoned and their valuable cargo of furs seized. Meanwhile, the *Detroit* was fired upon and set ablaze. General Isaac Brock, who was responsible for the defence of Upper Canada, reported the loss of the vessels with their cargoes of arms, shot, and furs, which he feared could lead to American superiority in the balance of power on Lakes Huron and Erie. It was his last official letter before his untimely death at Queenston.

Irvine's confinement lasted only a few days. Exchanged with other prisoners following the Battle of Queenston Heights, he was appointed second lieutenant in the provincial navy and departed for Amherstburg to join his new ship. He saw action next on January 22, 1813, at Frenchtown (now Monroe, Michigan) on the Raisin River—a victory for the British. Irvine distinguished himself on that occasion by recovering the drag rope for a British cannon that had been dropped between the opposing lines when the British fell back temporarily under heavy fire from the Americans. He was wounded, however, by a musket ball that

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA, PETER WINKWORTH COLLECTION OF CANADIANA / E000756944

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM, SIGMUND SAMUEL TRUST, 990.49.8

Top: Fort William, an Establishment of the N.W. Company on the north of Lake Superior, 1811, *watercolour, gum arabic, over graphite*, 17.5 x 25.5 cm. Bottom: Ships at anchor after the Battle of Lake Erie, 1813, *watercolour*, 26.4 x 37.7 cm. At the far left is the *Queen Charlotte*, from which Robert Irvine was taken prisoner.

entered his right heel. Recognized for his bravery and promoted to first lieutenant, Irvine was given command of the British brig *General Hunter* and participated in early May in the attack on Fort Meigs (now Perrysburg, Ohio).

By September 1813, he was serving under Captain Finnis, R. N., on a larger and more important vessel, the *Queen Charlotte*, during the Battle of Lake Erie near Put-in-Bay, Ohio. After Captain Finnis was killed and his next in line knocked unconscious by the splintering of a large timber, Irvine succeeded to the ship's command. But his lack of fighting experience was telling, and the *Queen Charlotte* was forced to surrender, defeated by the Americans under Captain Oliver Perry.

One of the finest of Irvine's watercolours is a view of four ships at anchor in Put-in-Bay after the British defeat in the Battle of Lake Erie. The stillness of the scene conveys a sense of melancholy, which must have been keenly felt by the artist, who had been imprisoned aboard one of the ships. At the centre of the composition is the newly built British flagship *Detroit*, totally dismasted. Next to her on the left is Irvine's ship, the *Queen Charlotte*. Close behind, the American vessels *Niagara* on the left and *Lawrence* on the right are identifiable by their flags.

Irvine was removed from shipboard confinement and sent along with more than 300 others to Camp Portage, near Sandusky, and then south through Ohio to Chillicothe. In late March or early April 1814, he and a group of 77 other prisoners were marched to Frankfort, Kentucky's capital, where they were to be confined in the state prison, but the prison proved too small. John Richardson, another internee, recalled in his 1842 book on the war that the officers, including Irvine, were given an allowance and billeted in the principal hotel in Frankfort, where they ate well and were free to enjoy the hotel's large garden. While most Kentuckians were hostile to the British, some showed uncommon courtesy and kindness, particularly Major George Madison (1763–1816), who had himself been a prisoner of war in Quebec until a short time before. Madison welcomed the British officers as visitors to his home and took them on excursions to sites of interest in the surrounding countryside. Irvine, to show his gratitude for Madison's kindness, made a model of a frigate for the Kentuckian's daughter.

Roaming freely around Frankfort, Irvine was able to sketch the prison from the outside. The composition is framed with foreground figures and with trees to left and right of the distant compound. We can see into the prison's walled enclosure where two British redcoats stand on the balcony of a long building, watching other prisoners sawing wood in the courtyard.

Of the two figures in the right foreground, one is almost certainly a self-portrait of the artist. He is seated on the ground, sketching, with his drawing paper balanced on the flat crown of a hat propped on his knee. Beside him lies his tray of watercolour cakes. The second figure, an older man wearing a caped coat, must also be intended as a portrait, possibly of Major Madison.

IRVINE'S WATERCOLOUR OF SHIPS AFTER THE BRITISH DEFEAT ON LAKE ERIE CONVEYS A SENSE OF MELANCHOLY, WHICH MUST HAVE BEEN KEENLY FELT BY THE ARTIST, WHO HAD BEEN IMPRISONED ABOARD ONE OF THE SHIPS.

In April 1814, the British and American authorities agreed to exchange prisoners, including Irvine, who were to be paroled home. Irvine's health had suffered since his capture and worsened on the return journey to Canada via Sandusky and Cleveland, a three-and-a-half month trek attended by fever and starvation. On his arrival back at York in October 1814, he recuperated at the home of his cousin George Crookshank, and passed the time sketching in the vicinity.

In a watercolour view of Toronto Island (in reality a peninsula at that time) looking from the York shoreline towards the lighthouse on Gibraltar Point, two figures sit on a partly visible jetty and watch as a sailboat towing a dinghy moves away from shore.

Another post-war sketch, this one in oil on paper, depicts Toronto's Front Street between Peter and John streets, including George Crookshank's home. Irvine would eventually work this close-up into a wide-angled composition.

Irvine's oil-on-canvas panorama of York is a mariner's view of the town seen from over the water—mostly sky, with the island lighthouse dominating the foreground. From this distant vantage point, York is barely visible, but when the painting is seen under magnification the buildings and at least one of the ships can be identified.

When Irvine had somewhat recovered his health, he was appointed naval storekeeper at Holland Landing. Irvine's rare and possibly unique view of Holland Landing records the site when it was a naval and military supply depot on the portage road between Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe. Log buildings, military tents, boats, and docks are lined up in a horizontal frieze along the marshy waterfront, against a backdrop of forest. Each structure and boat is reflected in the water; the artist has scratched out and re-worked portions of the foreground

KENTUCKY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO 53/32

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO 53/32

Top: STATE PENITENTIARY OF KENTUCKY, 1815, *watercolour, touches of gouache over graphite, 28.2 x 43.0 cm.* The artist has portrayed himself seated, and taking a sketch of the prison, with his box of watercolours on the ground at his side. Centre: VIEW OF YORK *(c. 1816), oil on canvas, 67.6 x 90.6 cm.* Bottom: VIEW OF YORK, *details.* A closer look at Fort York shows the commandant's brick house, which had been newly completed in late September 1815. The ship to the right of the lighthouse is almost certainly *H.M.S. Montreal*, recognizable by the rigging, repositioned gun ports, new deck, and other changes made when the vessel was converted into a troopship in early 1815. *Gift of the descendants of the late Mr. Stephen Heward, a daughter of the Hon. George Cruikshank and cousin of the artist who painted the pictures, 1953.*

to clarify the transition from land to dock to reflection.

In early 1816 Lieutenant-Governor Francis Gore made Irvine master of the provincial government schooner *Toronto* on Lake Ontario. It is likely that Irvine visited Queenston in that capacity, where he sketched a view from the Heights, site of the famous battle. The scene must date to the summer of 1816; hay is harvested in outlying fields, and many of the dwellings have been rebuilt after wartime destruction.

Also from this period is a panorama of the Kingston area, which captures the view from the heights of Point Henry, looking across Navy Bay towards the dockyards on Point Frederick and to the settlement at Kingston beyond. The focal point is the naval dockyard, where ships that saw service in the war are moored, dismasted, and roofed over. A plan of the Kingston yard of June 1816 corresponds closely with the vessels shown at anchor.

Kingston was the most important port on the Great Lakes during the War of 1812; at its zenith, its naval dockyard employed 1200 labourers. At left is one of the stone towers built on Point Henry in 1814. The workmen in the foreground are employed on works that were in progress in 1816. As master of the *Toronto*, Irvine was often at Kingston.

The view of Kingston is one of Irvine's most finished watercolours and the only known work to be signed. It is also his only located work that was not left with his Toronto relatives. Perhaps it was a presentation piece, or one that he intended to have published as a fine aquatint etching.

Irvine assumed that his position as master of the *Toronto* was more or less permanent and was understandably concerned when less than a year later, in a move to reduce public expenditures, Gore discharged him and handed the *Toronto* over to the naval authorities to be scrapped.

Following this setback, Irvine sought recognition of his wartime service in the form of land grants and half-pay. On the first count he was quite successful. After travelling to Quebec and putting his case before Sir John Coape Sherbrooke, Governor-in-Chief of British North America, he secured grants from the Government of Upper Canada for 1200 acres of land in the townships of Sophiasburg (855 acres near Bloomfield), Howard (320 acres near Ridgetown), and Oro (30 acres on Lake Simcoe). His efforts to secure half-pay, although they were eventually successful, dragged on for more than five years. Irvine's supporters included Lieutenant-Governor Sir Peregrine Maitland and Sherbrooke's successor as Governor-in-Chief, Lord Dalhousie, but the officials handling the matter in England proceeded with such bureaucratic caution that the matter was not finally settled until late 1822.

In the long process of winding up Irvine's estate, there was never any mention of his art—which today constitutes his chief legacy and epitaph.

Meanwhile, Irvine had to earn a living. By December 1817 he was captain of a merchant vessel sailing between Saint John, New Brunswick, and the West Indies. A year later he was master of the *Amelia* of Saint John, making regular trips to Antigua, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Thomas, St. Vincent, and Trinidad, carrying lumber, rum, sugar, and coffee. His last voyage on the *Amelia* took place in September 1821. He seems to have settled in the West Indies; he died at Bridgetown, Barbados, of unknown causes on 6 March 1823 in his 31st year, and was buried the following day in St. Mary's churchyard.

Robert William Crookshank, a cousin in Saint John, took on some of the work of settling the estate on behalf of Irvine's sisters, Isabella Strang and Margaret Flett, who inherited his movables, his cash, and all monies owing to him. George Crookshank of York acted for a niece, Ann Irvine Hamilton, to dispose of the lands in Upper Canada, which had been left to her. After fees, taxes, newspaper advertising, and postage had been deducted, she received only £185.

In the long process of winding up Irvine's estate, there was never any mention of his art—which today constitutes his chief legacy and epitaph. The whereabouts of 12 watercolours and two oils are known. Three additional oil paintings, versions of three of his watercolours—the views of Queenston, Niagara Falls, and the Battle of Lake Erie—were documented as being put to auction at Toronto in 1862 but have since been lost from sight. If there were other paintings among his movables left in New Brunswick, Ontario, Barbados, or Scotland, they remain to be discovered. ■

Rotunda's format does not allow for the referencing usually found in book-form publications. Visit the ROM Research Library to consult a fully annotated version of this article. The authors acknowledge the generous contributions of Irvine enthusiasts, marine experts, archivists, historians, and genealogists, and notably of Michael Korn, who pursued his research (in person) as far as the Orkney Islands.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA / C-145243

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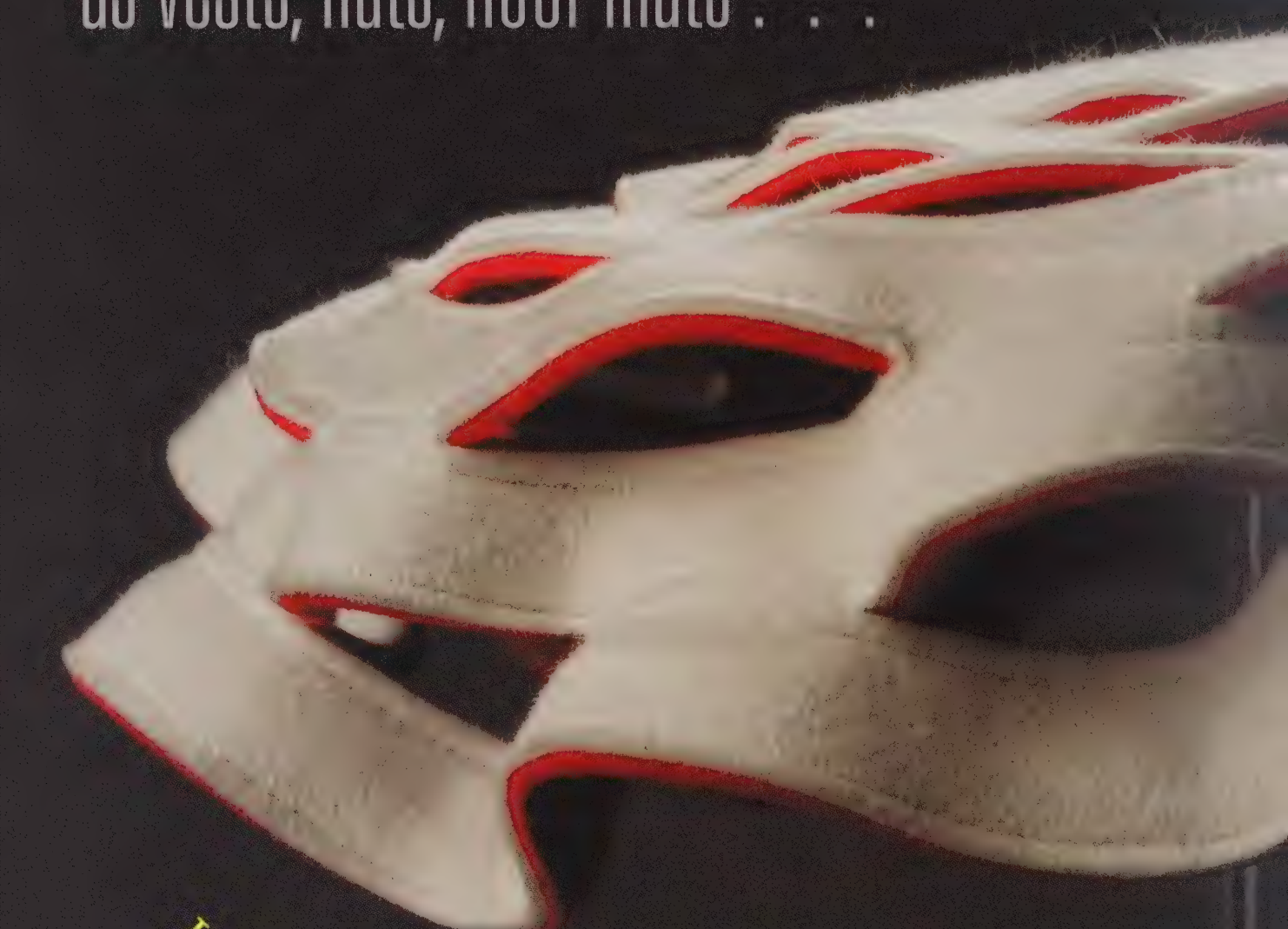
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM. BEQUEST TO THE ROM

Top: The Naval Yards at Kingston on Lake Ontario, c. 1814, watercolour, gouache, scratching out, 29 1/8 x 45 3/4 cm. Centre: Toronto Bay and Island c. 1814/15, watercolour over graphite, 25 1/4 x 45 3/4 cm. *National Archives of Canada, Peter Winkworth Collection of Canadiana/C-150597* Bottom: Front Street, York, c. 1813/15, oil on laid paper, 45 1/8 x 91 1/4 cm. Bequest to the Royal Ontario Museum. From left to right are the houses of the Hon. George Crookshank, the Hon. John Beikie, a tavern, and a commissary. Both the military storehouse and a group of marching soldiers allude to the presence of Fort York nearby.

Felt's Storied Past: From Morocco to Mongolia

for thousands of years felt has been the fabric
as vests, hats, floor mats . . .

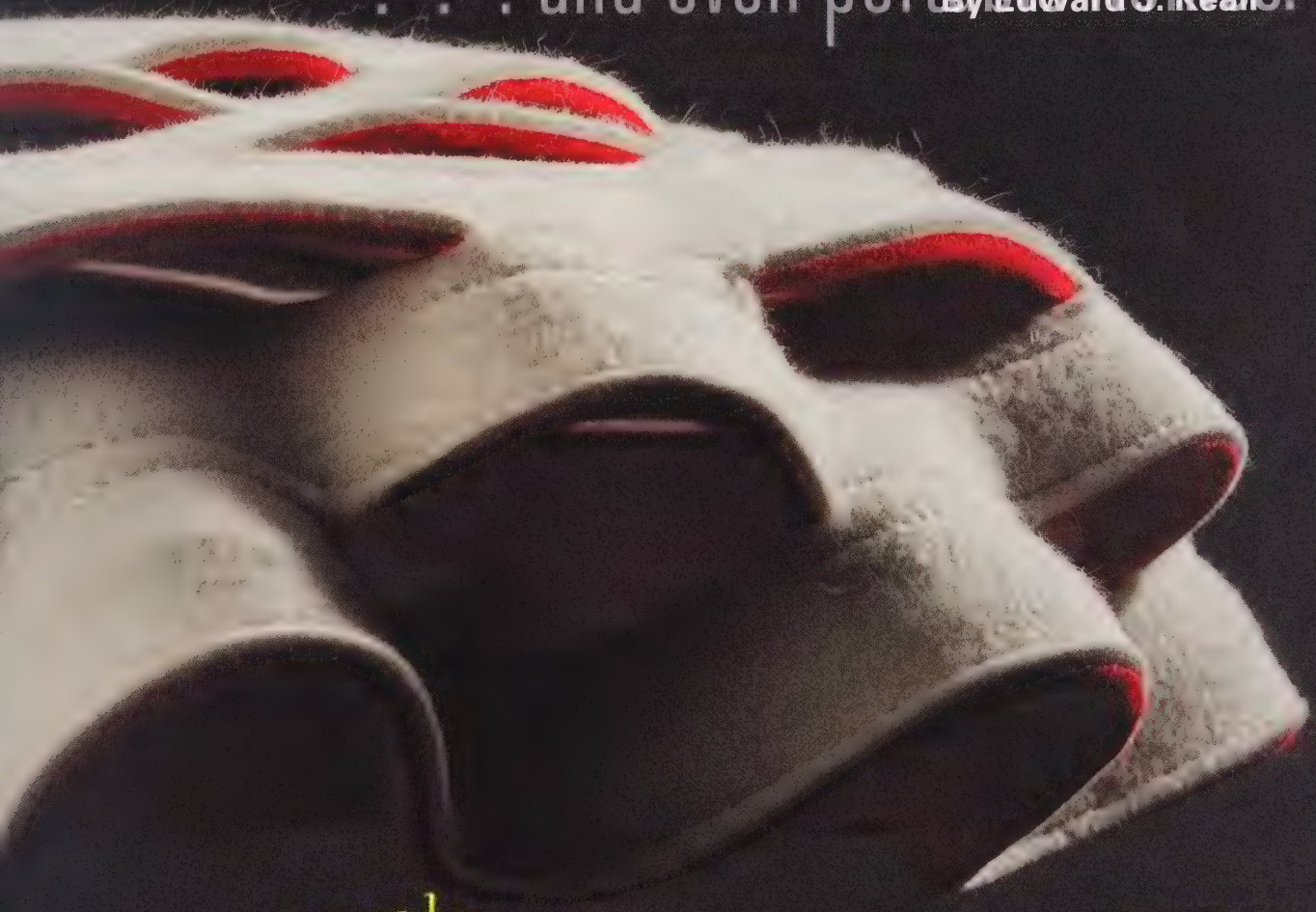


In China, legend has it that the Chinese accidentally inve

of choice for such diverse items

. . . and even portable homes.

By Edward J. Keall



d felt by placing wool under a saddle for padding. The horse's body . . .

BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 974.151

heat and sweat, together with friction under the saddle, caused the wool to become felt. Europeans believe that a saintly pilgrim put wool inside his sandals, inadvertently making felt insoles through the same action of heat, sweat, and friction while walking. For the Arabs it was a camel driver who surely did the same. The Iranians believe that Solomon's son became so enraged at his inability to make a carpet that he cried and cried, stamping on the wool that was wet from his hot tears. He, too, is said to have made the first felt, by accident.

None of these versions is likely true. Felt was made long before the Chinese had horses or Christian pilgrims existed. An accidental discovery, though, is highly feasible. (In my first term at university, I accidentally discovered how to felt a garment. In ignorance, I put my woollen sweater in the washer and drier. Naturally it came out as a shrunken, matted mess.) Chances are that a Central Asian shepherd, or perhaps a dog, slept on a pile of wool, creating a primitive kind of felt.

Whatever its origins, felt, with its many virtues, captivated ROM textiles curator Dr. Veronika Gervers. Of Hungarian origin herself, she was inspired by her father's interest in Hungarian needlework and became fascinated by the influence of Ottoman Turkish textiles on Europe. In the early 1970s, she researched the Eurasian origin of the Hungarian shepherd's felt mantle known as a *szür*.

As an extension of this research she studied felts in Turkey and Iran. In 1973, while visiting one of the ROM's archaeological projects in Iran with her husband, Michael, she asked the site's director, Dr. Louis Levine, to commission a traditional Iranian felt mantle for the ROM's textile collection the next time the itinerant feltmaker visited. By the 1970s, such cloaks were already becoming rare, being supplanted increasingly by much cheaper sec-

Top: This village woman's cloak made in 1973 in Kermanshah, Iran, was commissioned on behalf of ROM curator Veronika Gervers. Bottom: The craftsman decorated it with his trademark goat motif.

ond-hand overcoats distributed worldwide by aid organizations.

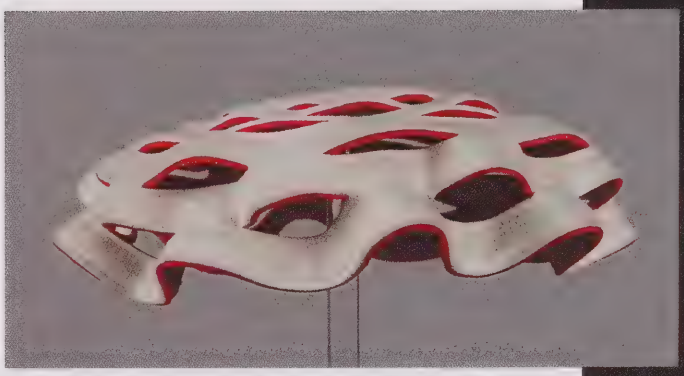
A commissioned mantle would be a valuable addition to the ROM's collection. Furthermore, as the cloak was being made, an equally valuable permanent record of the process could be produced. Dr. Levine documented the details, publishing his article in the 1977 Harold Burnham Memorial monograph, a series of essays published by the ROM to honour the memory of ROM curator Harold B. Burnham, a giant in the history of the Textile Department. The Iranian felt-maker, who travelled regularly, selling his services on a circuit from a village 30 kilometres away, purchased sufficient white wool for the project—a woman's cloak—and natural brown for the decoration. The decoration, a floppy-eared goat, was his own whimsical trademark. (On the same visit he made a floor mat for one of the ROM project team members using the same goat motif.)

The mantle is now just one of approximately 100 felt artifacts in the ROM's exceptional collection, which ranges from Morocco to Mongolia and includes vests, tunics, hats, slippers, floor mats, and blankets, with the largest item being a portable home, 13.5 metres (45 feet) in circumference, composed of wooden trellis-work covered with large swaths of felt. The first item was acquired in 1916—a Palestinian child's hat from Jerusalem. The oldest item in the collection dates back to around 1400.

Veronika Gervers built upon the collection started by others. After her tragic death in 1979 from unexpected medical complications, her husband, Michael, continued to collect felts in her memory. Either through purchase on the ROM's behalf or through his own donation, he contributed 30 felt articles between 1984 and 2001. He was the driving force behind the formation of the Veronika Gervers Fellowship Fund, which supports research into any of the ROM's extensive Textile and Costume holdings. Fellows come from all parts of the globe to research and contribute catalogue information to the collections, which range from French lingerie to Turkish felt army boots.

After nearly 20 years in storage, the Museum's collection of ethnographic felts is returning to display at the ROM. Looking at them, it's no wonder that Veronika grew so passionate about this versatile, natural material. The exhibition *A Felt Feeling: From Home to Handbag* examines the fabric's uses through history—in ethnographic populations during antiquity, in 19th-century and modern design, and in industrial applications.

Certainly, felt has many virtues: with neither seam nor selvedge, it can be made in any flat shape and can be cut without unravelling at the edges the way woven cloth does;



BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 966.10

AP / WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

A red and white felt hat with wired slashes to reveal the red colour, in the ROM's collection. It is a retail version of a Sally Victor design made in green and white for Mamie Eisenhower, as shown in this photo taken the day of the presidential inauguration, 1953.

BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 976.244

Made in 1970 in Afghanistan, this Turkoman floor mat is made of dyed woollen felt cut in shaped pieces and sewn together as a mosaic.

it can be moulded over a form or used for appliqué needlework and embroidery; white felt can be dyed rich colours, and natural-coloured felts can be used for decoration.

The cloth is dense and resilient yet soft and flexible. With these properties it lends itself to uses in insulation, linings, padding, filters, footwear, whole garments, mats, bags, even coverings for portable homes as described above. In contemporary settings designers appreciate felt for its strength, flexibility, and organic, some say sensual, quality.

The technique of felting was discovered thousands of years ago. The secret lies in the natural composition of wool. Sheep's wool is coated with microscopic scales that trap lanolin, an oil secreted from a follicle at the base of each fibre; the lanolin repels rain and snow, and prevents the woollen fleece from matting. Subjecting carded wool to hot soapy water causes the scales to open and the lanolin to be washed away. Agitating the wool and sprinkling on warm water encourages the fibres to wriggle in the path of least resistance—always away from the scale openings—and in the process they become completely entangled. The wool's naturally twisted crimp adds to the tendency to entanglement. As the wool dries, the scales contract, forming a dense mat of felt.

The earliest illustration of a felt mantle is from a wall decoration in a palace from ancient Iran, around 500 BC. The garment's cut clearly indicates that it was made of felt. The man depicted is a tribesman from Central Asia. Excavations in Siberia have also unearthed felt artifacts in tombs from roughly the same era. A 3rd-century BC Chinese text refers to the Hsiung-nu nomads as wearing felt and living in felt tents.

But wool was a standard part of the Central Asian pastoral way of life long before that. For centuries, tribesmen successfully grazed sheep on the open steppe or in the mountains for their milk and meat, selling excess male lambs for cash to buy staples they could not produce themselves. Today they buy rice, tea, sugar, colourful polyesters, knives, and guns. From the annually shorn fleece, a perpetually renewable resource, they make felt for their own use and carpets for market.

Sheep's wool was the original natural fibre used for felt making, and most types—except the so-called Downs short wool varieties—are ideal for the purpose. A healthy animal ensures a strong wool fibre. The properties of wool would have been known from hanks that caught on thorns, from pieces fallen during sheep's summer moulting, and from the skins of animals killed in the hunt. Around 10,000 years ago, wild sheep were first domesticated in Asia. Through selective breeding, the wild sheep's characteristics, particularly an increase in the length of their wool, slowly changed.

Never the cloth of choice for kings, who preferred exotic, delicate fabrics, felt provided basic clothing and shelter in subsistence societies. Sheep owners migrated with their animals in search of new pastures, retreating below the snowline in winter and following the growth of fresh grass to the mountains in springtime. There are those in Central Asia who still maintain this nomadic way of life to this day.

These tribespeople continue to live in traditional portable homes consisting of wooden poles and latticework covered by broad swaths of fabric; in warmer territories, the tents are covered with woven black goat hair that breathes, while also repelling light rain. But in the more northerly reaches, felt coverings provide better insulation against cold wind. In these extreme continental climatic conditions felt makes an ideal tent covering, since rain, which would make the felt rot, is rare. Powder snow is easily brushed off. Even those who have abandoned the nomadic lifestyle can be seen occupying these structures on their property in town while a permanent home is being built—like living in a trailer while the house is going up.

In Mongolia these structures are called *ger*, although the term by which they are best known in the West, *yurt*, comes from the Turkoman language. A short video documenting the assembling of the ROM's yurt is included in the current exhibition. Yurts are bare of furniture. Felt floor mats, which insulate against the cold ground, provide basic accommodation for sitting, eating, and sleeping. Decorations may be added to the walls as hangings of dyed wool or the natural blacks and browns. Stitched embroidery or overlaid dyed felt pieces are also sometimes used to colourful effect. The idea of decorating a felt camel saddle pad may seem whimsical, even frivolous. But it may also be the way the maker gets his competitive edge in the market.

For shepherds, felt mantles make a superior garment. Serving as cloak by day and sleeping pad by night, the felt mantle was introduced to central Europe by nomadic tribespeople from the steppes of Asia. In western Iran, the garment is known as *qaput*, in Turkey *kece*, and in Hungary *czür*. Many of these mantles, including the one Veronica Gervers commissioned for the ROM, have

MICHAEL PROCTOR

MICHAEL PROCTOR

Mobile trellis tents with felt covering like this one in the landscape of Xinjiang, China, are used by nomadic tribespeople.

Felt on Exhibit

A Felt Feeling: From Home to Handbag, on display in the ROM's European Temporary Exhibition Space from November 8, 2003, to April 12, 2004, explores the rich variety of felt use through history. At the exhibition's entrance, four items have been selected to represent that story: a traditional camel saddle underpad from Gujarat in India; a series of machine gaskets from the Toronto manufacturer E. F. Walter, Inc.; two 19th-century Canadian wall hangings depicting characters from a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta; and an armchair designed by Toronto felt designer Kathryn Walter.

BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 2001.82.56 GIFT OF DR. MICHAEL GERVERS

This felt protective pad was used for stacking china.

sleeves that are not functional. They are too slim for arms to fit in, and are sometimes tied together at the ends behind the back. Like buttons on the sleeves of contemporary men's jackets, these vestigial sleeves may reflect a former now-forgotten purpose. Some argue that hiding one's hands in the presence of a superior was a gesture of humility, and that the sleeves may reflect that now-discarded cultural politesse.

Felt hoods, either attached to a cloak, or separate, are an obvious extension of the felt cloak-making tradition. As with the cloaks, they originally tended to be coarse but practical items for rural people. Though increasingly replaced by cheaper imports, natural woollen felts are still preferred by those who appreciate the tradition. A shepherd can hold himself proud in a felt mantle, more so than in a Bay Street cast-off, no matter how good the quality of the latter. But the local felt-maker, who must buy first-quality wool and labour for many hours to make a felt mantle, cannot compete with items thrown into a bin for nothing at the Sally Ann.

Though felt had humble beginnings, the fabric's unequalled capacity for keeping its shape and for being cut at any angle without the edges unravelling made it ideal for hat-making. A piece of felt can be steam pressed over a mould to create the desired shape for a hat. The process is called "blocking."

Felt hats made from beaver pelts were produced in Russia well before the 13th century. By the 16th century, hats were being made from felted wool mixed with beaver fur. The downy under-fur of the beaver makes a felt of exceptional quality because it holds its shape and repels water far better than wool. Though much finer than wool, beaver under-fur is more difficult to process into felt. The tubular coverings of the fibre that repel water, which need to disintegrate before the fur can be felted, are much more solid than the scales on sheep's wool. Hat makers hastened the deterioration by dipping fur in a solution of mercury and nitric acid. The high incidence of mental disorders among these craftsmen caused by the mercury fumes spawned the expression "mad as a hatter." Blends of felted wool and beaver fur were adopted by the hatting industry as a more economical product than pure beaver felts, and rabbit under-fur also made a reasonably cheap substitute.

It is believed that the first European beaver-hat makers were refugees fleeing the Mongol onslaught of the 13th century. The beaver hat, like the felt mantle, is another example of East-West transfer of technology. Scandinavia, too, produced beaver hats because the animal was native there. In the

17th century, Swedish cavalier dress launched beaver hats to fashion fame and the animal was being hunted to extinction. Canada provided a new source. Cartier's reports of his 1530s and 1540s voyages to Canada make no special mention of beaver, but by the time of Champlain's 1610 report, beaver is an important part of the record.

As with other garments, felt hats often acquired special names because of their original place of manufacture or at least the public perception of where they came from. The cylindrical red felt fez from the city in Morocco of the same name is an example. The hat acquired fame there because of a local berry that produced a superior crimson dye. The fez replaced the turban as the official Ottoman headgear in the 19th century, until banned in 1923 when Turkey became a republic. Other examples of name association include the stetson (the name of the inventor). The stetson felt cowboy hat was the most famous product of the Philadelphia hat maker John B. Stetson who invented it in 1865. Besides the quality cowboy hat, Stetson's company produced other men's fashion hats. The stiff bowler hat got its name from the hat company that produced it. Originally known as the "coke" hat, it was commissioned by the future Earl of Leicester (William Coke) for use by his gamekeepers. Adopted by the gentry, it became known as a bowler in the UK when produced by the company Bowler & Son. In the U.S. it was known as a derby because of the fashion set by Lord Derby who wore it at the Epsom races. In Germany, the homburg was named after the city where it was made, while the fédora was the name of a play by Victorien Sardou performed in Paris in 1883.

Beginning with World War I, felt played an increasing role in the manufacture of shell munitions. Felt wadding was used in packing to keep separate the various explosive components of artillery shells. There were other uses, too, for military gear, such as hats, boots, crests, and canteen covers.

After World War II, the woollen felt industry declined because of a dramatic decrease in demand. With this loss of market share, felt manufacturers looked for creative ways to promote their product. Felt became important to the developing automobile industry, where woollen felts are still used, made to industrial standards. Metal machine parts can be most effectively polished with felt, a firm but soft abrasive, and precision-punched pellets of felt are ideal for pressure cleaning machinery tubes. Felt is also used in motor parts—washers, gaskets, reservoirs, bumpers, liners, seals, pads, and filters—for vehicles and machinery.

Fashion trends in the 1950s marked a time of uncertainty for the millinery trade because of the general decline in everyday hat use. But felt held its own as a designer hat fabric. The best example is the hat designed in New York by Sally Victor to be worn by Mamie Eisenhower for the presidential inauguration in Washington, DC, in 1953. Macey's carried a retail line of the original under the designer's label; one of them is in the ROM's collections. In 1965, a felt hat that reflected the curved towers was designed to be worn at the opening of Toronto's City Hall.

The item that most evokes the creative use of felt was the rock-and-roll poodle skirt of the 1950s, which catered to the Bobby Soxers and provided a cheaper version of the full skirt popularized by Christian Dior's "New Look" in fashion. Because it was easy to cut and sew, felt was perfect for homemade crafts. Instructions for making felt handbags and carrying cases were frequently featured in women's magazines of the day.

Increasingly, for reasons of economy, modern industry uses synthetic fibres forced mechanically into simulating true felt. These industrial felts are produced by systematically needle-punching fibres to force them into the desired tangled mass for use as paddings, linings, and filters. The universal blue winter-boot liners containing a mixture of fibres reflect this vital but nonetheless only supporting role for felt.

Recently, clothing designers have recognized the appeal in the natural quality of woollen felts. The ROM exhibition features items designed by felt artist Kathryn Walter. Kathryn's inspiration comes from the fact that her immigrant grandfather established a company in Toronto that made woollen felt. Although the business that thrives today as E. F. Walter, Inc., has diversified by adding synthetic felts to its line of production, the age-old fabric has begun to enjoy a new, well-deserved lease on life. ■

The sofa table's narrow top with collapsible drop leaves on the short ends is supported by four turned collonnettes that rest on a platform with concave sides. The platform, in turn, is supported by four splayed legs tipped with brass lion's-paw casters. This form is referred to as a pedestal table.

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By Ross Fox

Furnishing

PHOTOS BY BRIAN BOYLE, ROM

The name Thomas Nisbet resonates in the history of Canadian furniture as the unrivalled doyen of cabinetmakers in pre-Confederation Canada. Reputed for his fine-quality furniture, this Scots immigrant ran the largest and most prestigious workshop in Saint John, New Brunswick. His superb work reveals much about refined tastes in early-19th-century Atlantic Canada.

Today, Nisbet's furniture is found in private and public collections across the country. The largest public holdings outside New Brunswick are at the Royal Ontario Museum, which has five pieces with intact Nisbet labels and two other pieces attributed to him.

Documentation on Nisbet's years in Scotland is sparse, although we do know that he was born about 1777 in an unidentified locale. Perhaps it was in his ancestral town of Duns, a small market town in the Borders region. Said to have trained as a cabinetmaker under his father, Nisbet lived in Glasgow for an extended period. On March 28,

Thomas Nisbet's superbly crafted furniture represents the best in pre-Confederation cabinetmaking.

Excellence

1803, he married Martha Graham in that city. His name is listed in Glasgow directories from 1806 through 1811.

Financial success eluded Nisbet in his native land, compelling him to immigrate with his family to New Brunswick. They arrived in Saint John in 1811 and three years later Nisbet became a freeman of the city—that is, he received a certificate of citizenship allowing him to exercise his craft. His workshop grew rapidly and soon he was operating more as a retail merchant and entrepreneur than as a cabinetmaker.

The archaic term "upholsterer" captures Nisbet's fundamental role. From the outset of his arrival in the New World, Nisbet was careful to announce himself in printed matter as an upholsterer as well as a cabinetmaker. The original meaning of the word upholsterer was a cabinetmaker who specialized in furniture that incorporated textiles or leather. This meaning was superseded in the 18th century as the upholsterer assumed the status of expert on matters of décor, something like a modern-day interior decorator.

Left: Label from a piece of Nisbet furniture. Below: Portrait of Thomas Nisbet

FROM HUIA G.RYDER *ANTIQUE FURNITURE BY NEW BRUNSWICK CRAFTSMEN*

Clients would rely on an upholsterer for advice and to oversee the decoration of entire rooms, in their accoutrements as well as furniture. The cabinetmaker, on the other hand, was solely a maker of furniture. According to the craft hierarchy, an upholsterer ranked above a cabinetmaker.

In a notice in the Saint John *City Gazette* of April 10, 1813, Thomas Nisbet advertised his ability to supply all decorating needs "in the most approved and fashionable style." His audience fully understood the message: he was an upholsterer. A notice in the same newspaper on June 24, 1824, gives an idea of the full scope of his business, mentioning a vast assortment of articles recently imported from Great Britain, including mirrors, carpeting, curtain fabrics, wallpaper and borders, trimmings, window poles—the outfittings of an upholsterer, and not merely a cabinetmaker.

Nisbet produced a similarly considerable range of furniture. Tables of all kinds form the largest group of labelled pieces surviving today, but Nisbet also made sideboards, desks, light stands, dining chairs, easy chairs, sofas, bedsteads, chests of drawers, secretaries, bookcases, portable desks, and cellarettes (cases to hold wine bottles). Few contemporary cabinetmakers in Canada would have offered a comparable breadth of products.

Nisbet's extensive clientele lived in the geographic region encompassed by the St. John River Valley, the St. Croix River Valley, and the Bay of Fundy—in western Nova Scotia as well as New Brunswick. Although the tastes of the general population were conservative, Nisbet sought out and appealed to an upscale clientele—those who were anxious to emulate fashionable trends in both Britain and the United States. In part this was because news of the fashionable world was quick to come to Saint John, which lay on the main lines of transatlantic communication and commerce with London, Liverpool, and Greenock, and saw regular traffic with Boston and New York City.

Moving Toward Mechanization

Despite Thomas Nisbet's high stature in the history of Canadian furniture, he unwittingly contributed to its decline. He was a key player in the introduction of mechanization, which would eventually supplant the traditional craft practices of the cabinetmaker. It was a pre-industrial period transitional to the outright factory mass-production of mature industrialization.

With a population of 10,000 by 1824, Saint John ranked as the fourth-largest city in British North America. Among cabinetmakers, there was an interdependence of craftsmen and workshops linked in a sophisticated, local production network that facilitated the supply and exchange of materials, technical expertise, designs, and even workmen. Nisbet's participation as a supplier of piecework is an example. Though this was not a novel arrangement—it is rooted in age-old craft practices brought from Britain—it did have a considerable impact on local production practices. Without doubt, Nisbet was the dominant player in the local network. This state of interdependence was symptomatic of a system evolving towards increasing mechanization and integration of production.

The apogee of the Nisbet furniture business occurred before 1834, the year in which Nisbet took his son Thomas Jr. into partnership under the name Thomas Nisbet & Son. When the younger Thomas died in 1845, the father turned the business over to another son, Robert. Thomas Sr. died in 1850, but Robert continued the business until 1856.

During the late 1830s, the Nisbet workshop seems to have retained some of its earlier vigour, at least in terms of the size of its operations and the quantity of output. On June 10, 1837 (*New-Brunswick Courier*), the firm sought "Four or Five Journeymen Cabinet Makers, to whom consistent employment will be given." There was a definite decline, nevertheless, in the quality of output. Indicators such as the scarcity of later labelled pieces help to substantiate the hypothesis of a thriving enterprise that was slowly redirected to the almost exclusive production of ordinary furniture in native woods. Like many cabinetmakers in the early Victorian period, the Nisbets also turned to the increasingly lucrative business of making coffins.

After 1834, furniture was not Thomas Nisbet's only business. He devoted himself to other entrepreneurial endeavours in a city that was growing economically. His two principal concerns were the Saint John Hotel Company and the Saint John Mechanics' Whale Fishing Company. Nisbet was president of both businesses. Earlier he had been a partner with James Stewart in the shipping and importing firm of James Stewart & Co., which traded in goods from Britain and the East Indies. This business association lasted about six years, dissolving in 1828.

Ironically, Nisbet's openness of spirit, whether to new opportunities or innovations, helped to undermine the traditional craft of the cabinetmaker, at least where mechanization is concerned. The circumstances of his workshop and even more so, those of his sons, can be viewed as transitional to a more efficient system, which paved the way for factory production and a de-emphasis on quality. By the 1850s, Saint John, like Toronto and Montreal, was a major centre for mass-produced furniture.

Nisbet actively cultivated a demand for the latest designs among his clients by making them available first-hand. He informed the public, for example, on July 14, 1819, in the *City Gazette*, that he had "just received from England the newest Patterns of Furniture." Nisbet was able to keep up-to-date partly because most of his journeymen were, like himself, new immigrants, and therefore familiar with trends in the motherland. (His brother William, who had also trained in Glasgow, is thought to have been one of his workmen.)

Still, his clients were not predisposed to the high fashion of royalty, aristocrats, and plutocrats, but rather to a scaled-down version of current fashion, which validated their own more modest social aspirations and achievements. This version was more bourgeois and conventional. Nonetheless, it was endowed with tastefulness, and above all a sense of propriety.

Whatever the style, Nisbet's furniture is remarkable for its superior quality in the colonial Canadian context. Because he labelled a great deal of his output, he is also the only early Canadian cabinetmaker to whom a large body of work can be assigned with certitude. While a few other cabinetmakers occasionally used labels, the practice was not the norm in Canada, and few labelled pieces by others exist today.

The chief benefit of such a large body of certifiable work is that it enables experts to identify and tabulate distinguishing and even idiosyncratic features that are particular to the workshop. These features include woodworking techniques,wood preferences or use, and a partiality for certain distinctive designs or motifs. Though Nisbet's workshop was large, and he was concerned with retailing as much as fabrication, there is a considerable homogeneity to his labelled products. The fact that he himself was a highly skilled cabinetmaker no doubt was a factor in this Nisbet "look." It is surmised that he retained ultimate control over designs; moreover, he supervised workshop practices. The circumstance of a single

Left: A Pembroke table by Nisbet in the ROM's collection exhibits two of Nisbet's more familiar characteristics—ebonizing and rope twist motif on the legs. Right: The ROM's Nisbet example of a lady's work table is typical in that it does double duty—as both a sewing and a writing table.

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guiding hand would account for a pervasive standardization.

Despite this characteristic "look" of Nisbet's products, the attribution of unlabelled pieces must be approached discriminatingly. Prevailing fashions, outright imitation, and the fact that Nisbet was a source for piecework sometimes blur the distinctions between Nisbet's own craftsmanship and that of the local competition. The situation is further complicated by the transiency of journeymen, who took their skills and patterns from one workshop to another. Generic similarities aside, so many of Nisbet's labelled pieces remain qualitatively unsurpassed and rarely equalled by other Saint John cabinetmakers that quality can be both a relevant and a persuasive criterion in attributing some pieces to him, when found together with a number of his signature attributes. Still, pitfalls abound: sometimes a definitive determination remains elusive and is best avoided. (See Tim Dilworth, "Thomas Nisbet's Furniture: Distinctive Style, Design and Workmanship," *Material History Bulletin* 24, Fall 1986: 13–16).

A labelled Pembroke table in the ROM's collection exemplifies a form commonly made by Nisbet. The Pembroke table is so called because it was thought to have originated under the patronage of the Countess of Pembroke in the mid-18th century. The type is a small, slender, drop-leaf table with flaps or folding leaves on the long sides. A certain ambiguity of character betrays its true purpose. It is a multi-use occasional table. The fact that it is free-standing added to its versatility. Immensely serviceable for small meals, sometimes it is referred to as a breakfast table. Popular in Britain, it was introduced into Canada by the end of the 18th century where it was most prevalent in the early years of the 19th century.

The ROM's Pembroke table, though prosaic, evinces a hint of elegance. It features two of Nisbet's more familiar

The sophistication of Nisbet's sofa points to a mature developmental phase. Other unlabelled sofas with comparable carving in other, mostly private, collections exist. They likely originated in Nisbet's workshop.

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characteristics. Grooves in the table's legs are accented with ebonizing—black staining in imitation of ebony. Popular with Scots cabinetmakers in general, ebonizing is found with other Saint John cabinetmakers, but none employed it so consistently as Nisbet.

Even more typical is the rope-twist pattern, in this case also in the table's legs, each of which is topped with a bud-form knob carved with inverted acanthus leaves. The rope-twist pattern finds such extensive application in Nisbet's furniture that at one time it was regarded as an irrefutable leitmotif of his workmanship, warranting an automatic attribution to him. Today it is recognized as an insufficient reason in itself on which to base an attribution. The rope twist, loaded with nautical connotations, originated during the Regency period in England, where its adoption coincided with the naval victories of Vice Admiral Nelson, the greatest of which was the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. It alluded to Britain's role as the world's greatest maritime power. The motif was used by cabinetmakers not only in Saint John, but elsewhere in Canada, particularly in Montreal and Quebec City. In the last two cities, it is sometimes found in conjunction with ebonizing, as with Nisbet pieces, again underscoring the need for caution when making attributions.

Besides Nisbet, few craftsmen in Saint John would have been actually capable of producing rope-twist carving. It required a special turning apparatus, called a screw-thread lathe, which few could afford. It may be that most if not all the local cabinetry workshops depended on Nisbet for rope-twist components—either finished or turned in the rough—for incorporation into their own furniture. Newspaper advertisements inform us that Nisbet did piecework of this sort. As early as July 14, 1819, he advertised in the *City Gazette* that he had "engaged an experienced Turner from

the Old Country," which enabled him to supply "Bed Posts, Table Legs, &c. &c Carved, Twisted, Reeded, and otherwise ornamented." While the rope twist is not unique to Nisbet, he was probably instrumental in its dissemination among Saint John cabinetmakers.

Nisbet himself may have out-sourced some specialty work, at least occasionally. This may have been true of fine carving, which was performed by specialty carvers, who were an elite breed. There were woodcarvers in the local shipbuilding industry, which was a mainstay of the Saint John economy. Nisbet may also have employed carvers in his own shop. On August 29, 1835 (*New-Brunswick Courier*), Nisbet advertised for a turner who was also acquainted with carving.

Another distinguishing aspect of Nisbet's work is his use of veneering. He was one of only a few cabinetmakers in Saint John who worked with veneers. Typically, his wood of choice for this purpose was mahogany, which he imported as part of his business. On March 6, 1815, very soon after he opened his own shop, Nisbet announced in the *New-Brunswick Courier* that he had "received from Jamaica, a small quantity of Mahogany, and expects by the first arrivals from the West-Indies, a full supply of the same."

The veneering on a small, labelled table called a "lady's" work table, in the ROM's collection, departs from Nisbet's norm in its extensive use of native woods. Bird's-eye maple predominates in the veneering in the case, with mahogany used only selectively at the edge of the tabletop and in stringing (very thin strips of inlaid wood). Pine and birch are the secondary woods that make up the carcass. Usually Nisbet reserved labels for furniture made of mahogany. This table is an exception.

Nisbet's sofa table from the ROM's collection exudes a more rarefied air of colonial refinement. This is conveyed through a fastidious attention to decorative details, above all in the superlative carving of the acanthus leaves and roundels (decorative medallions) on the knees of the table's splayed legs. Among other more conspicuous Nisbet attributes, the sofa table incorporates triple-reeding (parallel convex ridges) at the edges of the tabletop and beading (bead-like carving) along the lower edge of the apron and again edging the side panels of the lower platform. Ebonizing is also present.

Sofas were top-of-the-line articles of furniture made by the colonial upholsterer. As early as 1815, Nisbet specifically mentioned them in his newspaper advertisements. Similarly, his labels, which also contain advertising information, consistently refer to "sophas and sopha beds" as among his products. Thomas Sheraton, the noted English authority on furniture design, recommended that a drawing room have two sofas, but these were luxury items in colonial times. Owning a single sofa did not become commonplace among the moderately affluent classes until the 1790s.

A splendid sofa by Nisbet in the ROM's collection is said to have belonged for many generations to a family in St. Stephen, New Brunswick. It is of so-called Grecian type with scrolled arms, which developed independently in both England and the United States, inspired ultimately by French prototypes. In England it was associated with the Regency style, in the United States with the Empire style. The type was introduced into Canada in the early 1820s; the ROM sofa would certainly have qualified as the latest fashion promised in Nisbet's ads.

The carcass of an almost identical Nisbet sofa, with identical label, is in the New Brunswick Heritage Collection. Made for Government House in Fredericton, the piece reflects a high-water mark in Nisbet's career—in 1824, he was engaged to furnish the lieutenant-governor's official residence. Provincial authorities intended to purchase the furniture in England, but in the end decided to involve Nisbet. He received the lion's share of the contract, amounting to more than £880 versus £424 divided among

The Upholsterer and the Cabinetmaker

The role of the upholsterer versus cabinetmaker is captured by Isaac D'Israeli in a contemporary review of the novel *Bogle Corbet* by John Galt, published in 1831. In his day, Galt was a popular Scots novelist. A contemporary of Nisbet, Galt was also a Canadian pioneer. As field director of the Canada Company, he oversaw settlement of the enormous Huron Tract of southern Ontario during the late 1820s. Fittingly, *Bogle Corbet* recounts the story of a genteel Scots immigrant who founded a town in Upper Canada, which in reality closely parallels Galt's own role in the founding of Guelph. D'Israeli, quoted in Robina and Kathleen MacFarlane Lizar's, *In the Days of the Canada Company* (Toronto, 1896), panned the novel: "It is another proof, if one were wanting, that the booksellers step from their line when they give orders like to an upholsterer for a piece of furniture." The analogy is that of a bookseller (publisher) and an upholsterer. A bookseller cannot tell an author what to write in the way an upholsterer tells a cabinetmaker what to make. That is why, in his estimation, *Bogle Corbet* failed as a novel.

The X-stretcher joining the legs of this ROM chair by Nisbet is found on both Scots and American chairs of the period. But the overall character of the chair is remarkably Scots.

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unknown English cabinetmakers. Just the next year a fire destroyed Government House. When a new viceregal residence was erected between 1826 and 1828, more furnishings were required and again Nisbet was enlisted as principal supplier. This preferment is a reflection of the high esteem in which Nisbet's contemporaries held him. In subsequent years, he was awarded other government contracts for provincial and municipal chambers and offices in Fredericton and Saint John.

Both the ROM and the Fredericton sofas have superb carving. The fronts of the arms of both sofas are carved with an attenuated and scrolled dolphin motif. The front legs are carved as winged, hairy paws. The nearest design references are to sofas made in New York City. An American cast to some of Nisbet's work is a reminder that during the 1780s, New Brunswick was settled by thousands of immigrants from the United States.

Among the furniture at the ROM attributed to Nisbet is a pair of Regency dining chairs, which form part of a set that descended in the Winslow family of Woodstock, New Brunswick. The original owner is presumed to have been John Francis Wentworth Winslow (1793–1859), a long-time sheriff of Carleton County. Winslow was the son of the distinguished Loyalist, Colonel Edward Winslow. (The family came from Massachusetts and its earliest American progenitor, Edward Winslow, was a passenger on the *Mayflower* and governor of Plymouth Colony.)

Like John Winslow, most of Nisbet's clients were the children of Anglo-Americans who had fled the United States after the Revolution. Fervent in their homage to king and motherland, they flaunted English trappings as emblems of their allegiance. Despite lingering political animosities, they were still bound to the United States by familial, ethnic, and cultural ties, which were reinforced by its proximity.

In his furniture for these clients, Nisbet melded English, Scots, and American formal aspects. The unifying feature is a predominant sobriety, which derives from Scots furniture and was highly suited to the tastes of the prosperous members of this provincial, and still colonial, society.

The various influences can be seen in the ROM's card table or games table by Nisbet. In the colonies, card playing was a popular pastime, and a pair of card tables was a coveted status symbol. Scots and American cabinetmakers were partial to the brass lion's-paw casters as seen on the ends of the ROM table's legs. The pineapple motif of its central pillar has antecedents in American Federal furniture. Otherwise, the form is ultimately English in derivation.

Today, Nisbet's reputation is based on furniture such as that found at the ROM. Still, we are faced with the conundrum that not all of his furniture was of the highest order—he also made furniture to satisfy the vernacular tastes of the middle and lower echelons of colonial society. An example is a labelled rod-back chair at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. This category of furniture was made in native woods such as birch and maple, rather than mahogany. Little is known about such work because Nisbet routinely refrained from labelling pieces of this type. He is remembered largely as the maker of an abundance of fine-quality furniture in mahogany.

Evidence suggests that Nisbet was capable of producing furniture of an even higher order, of reproducing designs that transcended what the wealthiest of his colonial clients could either want or afford. He was restrained only by their financial limitations and parochial outlook. Within these parameters, among his generation in British North America, Nisbet represents the best in colonial Canadian cabinetmaking. While Thomas Nisbet succeeded as a businessman as well as a craftsman, it is his furniture that endures as his permanent legacy. His work epitomizes the immeasurable contribution over the centuries of Scots cabinetmakers and craftsmen to the decorative arts of Canada. ■

FOREIGN

THROUGHOUT THE AGES, ARTISTS IN CYPRUS HAVE TRANSFORMED FOREIGN AESTHE

A fragmentary bronze relief from Cyprus dating from about 1200 BC shows Greek and near Eastern influence in its depiction of a frontal eye on a profile face, yet it is typically Cypriot in content—Cyprus was famous for its copper, carried by the figure in the form of an ingot.

THE SUN-DRENCHED island of Cyprus, birthplace of Aphrodite, is strategically situated at the crossroads of three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa. Across the millennia, it has attracted wave after wave of traders, colonists, and invaders.

Ships from all corners of the Mediterranean Sea sailed into her harbours, bringing such goods as wine, wheat, olive oil, expensive perfumes, and rare scented oils in exchange for copper, the island's most important export. But in addition to transporting commercial goods for exchange, Cyprus's trading partners and the foreign powers that intermittently controlled the island also brought with them their cultural heritage. These varied influences and the turbulence of occupation and re-occupation had a momentous impact on local sculpture; the country's history is clearly reflected in works of sculpture produced in Cyprus throughout the ages. Cypriot sculptors transformed those foreign aesthetic currents to create their own highly original art forms. Both foreign and local influences can be detected in select pieces from the more than 800 works in the ROM's collection of Cypriot art.

Around 600 BC, Cypriot sculptors began using locally quarried limestone; marble had to be imported. The practice spread quickly across the island's 9251 square kilometres (3584 square miles), and limestone became the quintessential characteristic of Cypriot stone sculpture for the next 600 years.

The first civilizations to impress Cyprus's sculptors were from the East. During the Bronze Age, 2500–1050 BC, the people of Cyprus came into contact with the populations of Anatolia (now part of Turkey), Syria, and Egypt. Later, artists

EXCHANGES

INFLUENCES TO CREATE THEIR OWN HIGHLY ORIGINAL ART FORMS • BY PAUL DENIS

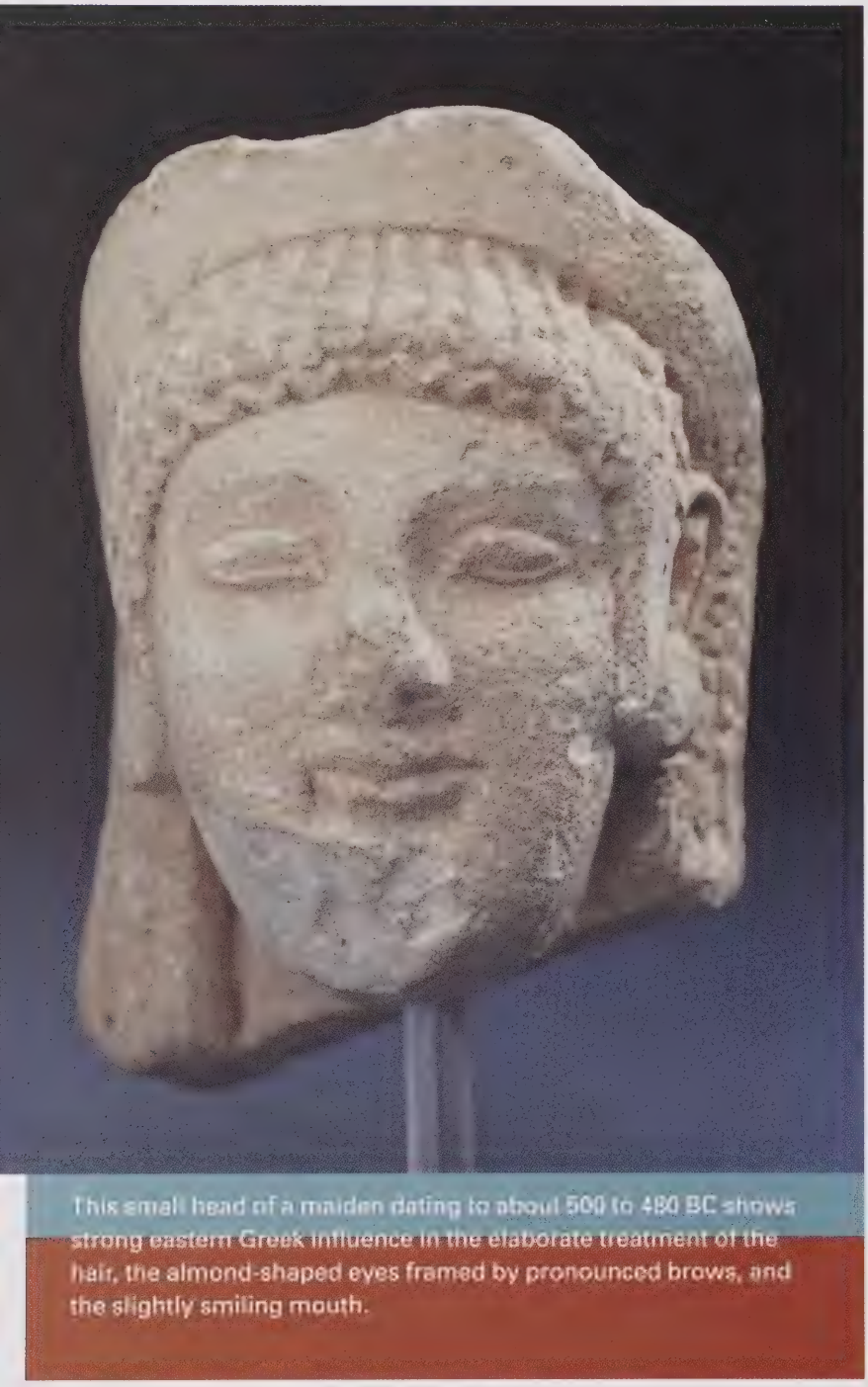
were inspired by civilizations in the West, the Minoans from the island of Crete, and the Mycenaeans from mainland Greece. Relations were friendly and the interrelations and commerce between Cyprus and her trading partners are reflected, for example, in the quantity of Cypriot ceramics from this time that are found in Egypt and the Levant and in the array of imported ceramics found in Cypriot tombs, especially from Mycenae.

Cypriot relations with the people of Mycenae culminated around 1200 BC as major waves of Achaeans, Mycenae's inhabitants, immigrated to Cyprus, bringing with them Greek language, customs, and religion. From that time onward, Cyprus, which had mainly been within the sphere of influence of the Near East, was now gradually drawn into the Greek world.

Achaean and near Eastern influences are seen in a fragmentary bronze relief from Cyprus dating from the Late Bronze Age, about 1200 BC, now in the ROM's collections. One of the rarest and finest pieces in the ROM's Cypriot collection, the relief vividly depicts a man carrying a copper ingot. His face is sculpted with a large frontal eye on a profile face. Yet the ox-hide shape of the ingot is typically Cypriot. Cyprus was so famous for its copper mines that the island's name in Greek, Kypros, translates as copper. Ingots smelted in Cyprus during the Late Bronze Age were cast in the shape of a rectangle with concave sides resembling an ox-hide. The corners were drawn out into handles for ease in carrying. A break above the ingot-bearer's head suggests that this figure originally formed part of a larger object—namely a four-sided stand with each side decorated with different figures. Such stands were very rare and were probably

Left: This votive figurine from the late 7th to 6th century BC betrays eastern Syrian-Hittite influence in the conical hat with earflaps tied up. The votary is depicted without footwear because he is standing on sacred ground. Right: This Cypriot statuette of a male figure dating from the 6th century BC is clearly Egyptian in style.

The Greek influence continued on Cyprus as the Assyrians (from modern-day northern Iraq) took control of the island, ruling from about 707 to 612 BC. Sculpture with religious



This small head of a maiden dating to about 500 to 480 BC shows strong eastern Greek influence in the elaborate treatment of the hair, the almond-shaped eyes framed by pronounced brows, and the slightly smiling mouth.

used in a temple for religious purposes, perhaps as a dais to hold a libation bowl. A few of the stands in museum collections today rest on four wheels and may recall objects mentioned both in Homer and in the Hebrew Bible. Considering the limited technology available at the time, the stands were considered technical marvels. They were exported to Crete, Sardinia, and the Levant, where they were highly prized. In the Aegean, particularly on Crete, the stands were imitated in both clay and bronze well into the first millennium BC.

The Greek influence on Cyprus continued as the Assyrians (from modern-day northern Iraq) took control of the island, ruling from about 707 to 612 BC. Sculpture with religious content also continued. Some of the most common sculptures of the time were votive offerings left at the sanctuaries of divinities.

Many of the sculptures in the ROM's Cypriot collection originated from the Sanctuary of Apollo at Tamassos in central Cyprus, an area known for its rich copper mines. Inhabited since the Bronze Age, Tamassos had became one of the ten city-kingdoms of Cyprus by the 9th century. Later in the Archaic period, in the 7th to 6th centuries BC, the city flourished, becoming an important economic, religious, and artistic centre.

This was also the heyday of santuaries in Cyprus. Outdoor shrines containing votive figures sometimes numbering in the hundreds were typical of Cyprus. Varying in size, the ROM's limestone and terra cotta sculptures (see "Terra Cottas," page 42) from Tamassos are rather fragmentary; however, their superb artistry is still evident. A limestone image dating from the late 7th to the early 6th century BC depicts

content also continued. Some of the most common sculptures of the time were votive offerings left at the sanctuaries of divinities.

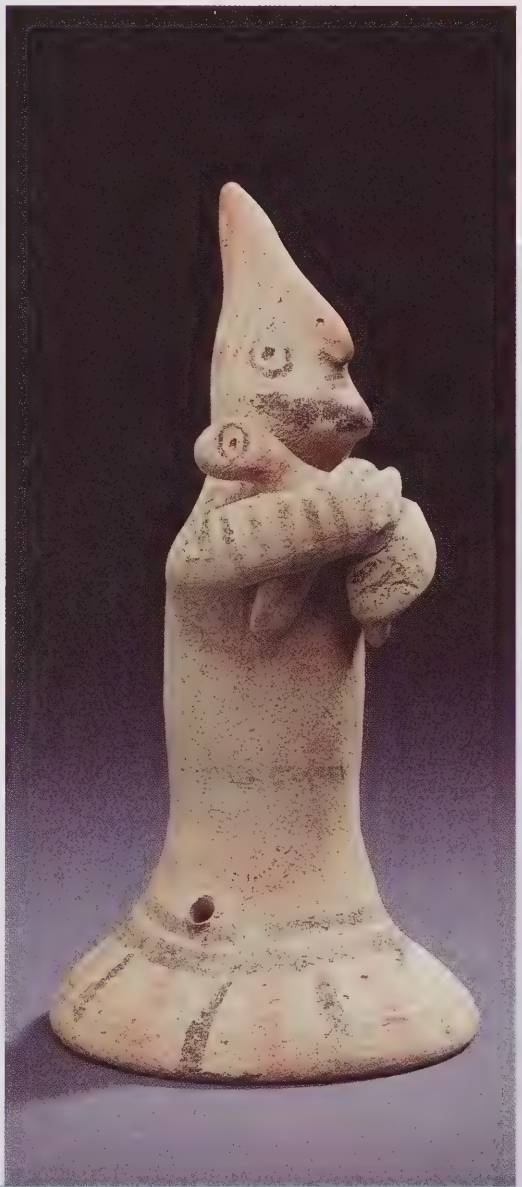
a man wearing a conical cap with earflaps tied up, a type of headdress that recalls caps of eastern Syrian-Hittite origin. Supplicants would leave images of themselves, such as this sculpture, as votive offerings at the sanctuary of a deity, so that they would always be worshipping the god. The Cypriot characteristics include the use of limestone and the simplified treatment of the figure's drapery, while the rendering of the face, with almond-shaped eyes in relief and slightly smiling lips, betrays Greek influence.

When Egypt held sway over the island, from about 570 to 540 BC, shortly after the collapse of the Assyrian empire, sculptors adopted an Egyptian style in their work. A statuette of a male figure dating from the early 6th century BC clearly reflects Egyptian influence in the stance, the broad shoulders and narrow waist, and the attire. The figure wears an elaborate Egyptian collar over his chest and an ornate *shenti* (Egyptian kilt), fastened with a wide belt. The *shenti's* apron is decorated with an eye of Horus and a pair of elongated pendant serpents. Recent scholarship suggests that Egyptian-influenced sculpture in Cyprus dating from the 6th century BC was inspired by the Phoenicians, who arrived in the mid-9th century BC from Tyre. Direct Egyptian influence on Cypriot art appeared after 570 BC.

From about 525 BC, it was the Persians who dominated Cyprus until 333 BC. During this period, the Cypriots joined forces with the Greeks from cities along the eastern coast of Asia Minor in their lengthy wars to free themselves from their mutual Oriental overlord. This collaboration reinforced the long-standing ties between Greece and Cyprus. Cultural influences on Cyprus during this era, as a result, were eastern Greek,

Left: This male votary carved in Cyprus around 450 to 430 BC is unique to the ROM's collection in the texture of the figure's short-sleeved crinkly chiton, or tunic, representing wool cloth. Right: A Hellenistic male statuette from about 300 BC was inspired by the so-called "Sophocles type" in the Lateran Museum, Rome, in its proud pose and rich drapery folds emphasizing the contours of the corpulent body.

Throughout Cypriot history, the island's sculptors produced a distinctive form of terra cotta sulpture. These distinctive figurines, imbued with vitality, charm, and occasional whimsy, were not much



Left: Often called a "plank-shaped figurine" because of its flatness and stylization, figures like this one dating from about 1900 to 1700 BC are pleasing to our modern aesthetic taste because of their abstraction. Right: Dating from the archaic period, about 600 BC, this figure of a man holding an animal was a votary offering left at a sanctuary.

not Persian. A small archaic head of a maiden, dating to about 500–480 BC, shows strong eastern Greek, or Ionic, influence in the elaborate treatment of the hair, the almond-shaped eyes framed by pronounced brows, and the slightly smiling mouth.

TERRA COTTAS

Throughout Cypriot history, in addition to the foreign-influenced limestone works, the island's sculptors produced a distinctive form of terra cotta sculpture. These indigenous figurines, imbued with vitality, charm, and occasional whimsy, were not much influenced by outside cultures.

Handmade terra cotta figurines dating from the Bronze Age show none of the Aegean influence. Sometimes these locally made statuettes were used to express concepts of fertility and regeneration. A simple terra cotta female figure in the ROM's collection dating from about 1900 to 1700 BC is often called a "plank-shaped figurine" because of its flatness and stylization. These stiff and strictly frontal figurines, very pleasing to our modern aesthetic taste because of their abstraction, have so far been found only in tombs and are thought to symbolize rebirth.

Another Bronze Age terra cotta, a female figurine from about 1450–1200 BC, is shown standing with her arms drawn forward and resting on her stomach. Such figurines have been found in tombs and are most likely symbols of fertility. An anthropomorphic jug, dating from about 1700 to 1500 BC, represents a fanciful creation, perhaps a fertility goddess associated with water.

influenced by outside cultures. Handmade terra cotta figurines dating from the Bronze Age show little Aegean influence. Sometimes these locally made statuettes were used to express concepts of fertility.

This small head competently recreates a Greek *kore* (maiden), demonstrating that Cypriot artists were under the spell of Greek art. A statue of a male votary with round face, slight smile, and almond-shaped eyes with thick lids, carved some 50 years later, reveals

Like the limestone carvings, terra cotta figurines were also used as votive offerings left at sanctuaries. An example from the archaic period, dating from about 600 BC, shows a man holding an animal. The lower section of his body is bell-shaped and tapers upward to form a narrow cylinder that ends with a head wearing a conical hat.

Models of chariots and horses with or without a rider were also offered at sanctuaries. An elegant pair of high-necked horses in the ROM's collection is embellished with painted decoration. A sculpted *quadriga* (chariot drawn by four horses) from the 6th century BC in the ROM's collection, mostly handmade and richly decorated with painted details, carries the driver as well as a larger warrior holding a shield. Chariot models were usually offerings to male deities.

Among the military elite, a chariot with horses was a prized possession, symbolizing wealth and status. In fact, archaeologists have discovered the remains of actual chariots and horses in the entranceways leading to the tombs of the wealthy in a cemetery near the city of Salamis. The horses were sacrificed and the chariot left behind as a dedication to the deceased warrior.

Top left and right: Models of horses with or without a rider, like this elegant pair, were left as offerings at sanctuaries. Bottom left: This female figure was found in a tomb, most likely a symbol of fertility. Bottom right: Chariot models were usually offerings to male deities.

Ties with Greece grew even closer when, as a reward for military support, Alexander the Great freed Cyprus from Persian domination in 333 BC.

A fanciful anthropomorphic jug dating from about 1700 to1500 BC may represent a fertility goddess associated with water.

a Cypriot sculptor's interpretation of Greek art from the early Classical period.

Ties with Greece grew even closer when, as a reward for military support, Alexander the Great freed Cyprus from Persian domination in 333 BC. Eleven years later, the death of Alexander ushered in the Hellenistic period for the Mediterranean world and Cypriot art became more mainstream, reflecting the dominant styles of the Greek world, especially those from Alexandria and Pergamon (in modern-day Turkey). A fine male statue exemplifies this trend in Cypriot art. Here, the sculpture is more natural looking in the rendering of both his physiognomy and his *chiton* and *himation*, or tunic and cloak. Cypriot elements are evident in the use of limestone and the simple, naïve rendering of the sculpture.

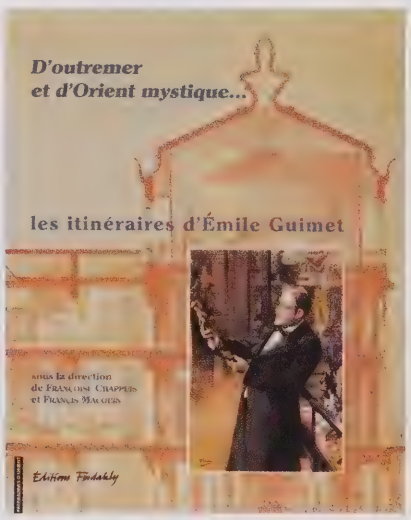
While many cultures were brought to—or thrust upon—Cyprus across the millennia, they were quickly absorbed by local sculptors, and at the same time Cypriot works of art retained a national character. Cypriot art does not imitate. Forged by a spontaneous creativity and infused with its own dynamic personality, Cypriot sculpture reflects the world in which it was produced. ■

Many of the artifacts mentioned in the article are currently on display at the ROM in the exhibition *Ancient Cyprus: A Preview of The A. G. Leventis Foundation Gallery of Cypriot Antiquities*. This exhibition is a preview of the forthcoming Cyprus gallery scheduled to open on December 5, 2005. The Royal Ontario Museum is deeply grateful to the A. G. Leventis Foundation of Nicosia, Cyprus, for its generous support.

Of Dust and Dreams

FEATURE REVIEW

As Renaissance ROM unfolds toward the opening of the Daniel Libeskind–designed Michael A. Lee-Chin Crystal in 2005, and the restoration of the ROM's heritage architecture in 2007, LIBRIS looks at a sister museum, the Musée Guimet, in Paris, France, whose own recent renaissance reconfirmed the ideals of its founder and augmented its status as a vital cultural attraction. *D'outremer et d'Orient mystique* is a beautiful and authoritative account of the Guimet, from its pre-history and conception to the present day, a tribute to the power of vision.



D'outremer et d'Orient mystique: les itinéraires d'Émile Guimet

Françoise Chappuis, Francis Macouin (Editions Findakly, Deluxe Paper: $44.99)

In a reaffirmation of its origins, and especially the principles and intent of its founder, Émile Guimet (1836–1918), the celebrated Musée Guimet, of Paris, France, newly renovated for a new century, reopened its doors to an enthusiastic public in January of 2001. The museum was built on the dreams (and fortune) of French industrialist Émile Guimet, opening in Lyon in 1889 and moving to Paris 10 years later. His dreams and fortune were in turn built on the invention, by his father, Jean-Baptiste Guimet, in 1826, of *bleu Guimet*, synthetic lapis lazuli (*outremer*), for which he received France's coveted *Légion d'Honneur*. The pigment, a brilliant ultramarine powder, the formula for which could be modified to produce green, pink, and purple as well, became part of art history when Ingrès used it copiously in his *Apothéose d'Homère* (1827). It would be used abundantly in Lyon's emerging textile industry and other manufacturing applications, the demand for it met by the Guimet factories.

Born into a household of wealth, culture, and privilege, Émile Guimet was truly a *l'uomo universale*, a Renaissance man, a practical and effective manager of his industrial empire, as well as an author, ceramicist, and composer of love songs. His moralistic and spiritual sensibility led him to study the religions of the world, in turn leading to his extended journey, of 1876/1877, to Egypt, Japan, China, India, Spain, Turkey, Greece, Romania, and the United States, the "New World" of Atonin Dvořák. He was accompanied by his friend Félix Régamey, who shared Guimet's wanderlust, and whose paintings and drawings of their quest, on exhibit at Musée Guimet, form an illuminative chronicle.

In his wanderings, Guimet's vision emerged: he would create an encyclopedic museum of the religions of Ancient Egypt, classical antiquity, and Asia, each artifact an elevated expression of sanctity. He was eager to create an institution through which the spiritual significance of the religious iconography could be communicated. To this end, he invited Buddhist priests to conduct sacred ceremonies at the museum, creating in effect a Buddhist temple in the heart of Paris. Passionately idealistic about fostering understanding among people of diverse cultures and social classes, he determined to make Musée Guimet inclusive, a museum for the people, but also a haven for the connoisseur. The newly reconceived Musée Guimet has remained true to these ideals. The sacred ceremonial space has been rededicated. The architecture emphasizes natural lighting and open vistas, the effect that of a serene promenade. The "mystic orient" has never been so accessible. The spirit and vision of Émile Guimet persist.

Glen Ellis is head of Publications, Royal Ontario Museum. Ariane Guimet, a Royal Ontario Museum intern, is the great-great-granddaughter of Émile Guimet.

REVIEWED BY GLEN ELLIS AND ARIANE GUIMET

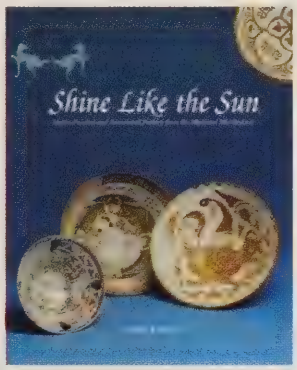
Prehistoric Art: The Symbolic Journey of Humankind

Randall White
(Abrams, Cloth: $70)

In 1986, Randall White served as guest curator for *Dark Caves, Bright Visions: Life in Ice Age Europe*, an exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History, which featured cave art from the European Upper Paleolithic (40,000 to 12,000 years ago). The exhibit struck a responsive chord with New Yorkers as a wave of paleomania washed over areas of Gotham. In the SoHo district, imitative images of Ice Age animals—mastodons and woolly mammoths—were painted onto sidewalks and walls. Statuettes of the human female form proliferated. The Venus of Willendorf, actually palm sized, was re-rendered on a Kongian scale outside a storefront in Manhattan's East Village. It was as if the ancestral voice of the tribe had spoken across the millennia and had been heard by the tribal descendants.

Prehistoric Art brings together paintings and artifacts from our global prehistory—"rock art," tools, weapons, musical instruments, and items of personal adornment. The approach is anthropological. Some of the best material is about the Inuit and their cultural collision with the western world of the mid-20th century. Traditional Inuit visual perception/perspective may shed light on earlier ways of seeing. On being presented with a sketch of arctic mammals, each oriented in a different direction, contact Inuit were quickly able to decipher the visual record without turning the paper to "right-side-up." The single perspective of a photograph did not impress because the camera, in one observer's words, "mechanically excluded movement, time, myth, sound, color, odors, imagination, and dreams." The photographs include a pair of walrus ivory snow goggles (from Point Barrow, Alaska) in the ROM's collections.

ROM BOOKS



Journey to the Ice Age: Discovering an Ancient World

Peter L. Storck
(UBC Press/ROM, Cloth: $65)

Senior ROM curator emeritus and archaeologist Dr. Peter Storck brings to life the vanished world of Ontario's earliest peoples. A compelling story, powerfully told. Available March 2004.

I Brought the Ages Home

Charles T. Currelly
(ROM, Cloth: $50)

Scholar, adventurer, explorer, Charles T. Currelly, the ROM's first director, seemed to combine the qualities of an Oxford don and Indiana Jones. This is his story, and the story of the founding of the ROM and its celebrated collections. Gift-edition reprint of the 1956 Ryerson Press original. To be published March 19, 2004, the 90th anniversary of the opening of the ROM.

Shine Like the Sun: Lustre-Painted and Associated Pottery from the Medieval Middle East

Robert Mason
(ROM/Mazda Publishers, Cloth:$65)

Using a multidisciplinary approach, ROM archaeologist Dr. Robert Mason provides the first comprehensive study of glazed pottery from the Medieval Middle East (7th to late 13th century). Available March 2004.

The ROM Field Guide to Wildflowers of Ontario

Jennifer Bull, Richard Dickinson, Timothy Dickinson, Debra Metsger
(ROM/McClelland & Stewart, Paper: $27.99)

The definitive field guide to Ontario wildflowers. Lavishly illustrated with more than a thousand colour photographs by acclaimed naturalist photographers. Designed for quick and accurate species identification. Available May 2004.

Visit the ROM Books feature on the Museum's Web site (www. rom.on.ca) for the latest information about ROM publications and co-publications.

A Charmed Find

A fossil coral found in Sundridge, Ontario, has remained intact for millions of years thanks to a series of lucky breaks.

Dear ROM,

When I was a child I found this object somewhere on Forest Lake Road in Sundridge, Ontario. Thinking it was a tooth, I kept it as a lucky charm and I have had it for about 10 years. I am asking for any opinion of what it might be.

Angel Janveau
South River, Ontario

Dear Angel,

What you have found is not a tooth, but a solitary rugose coral, often referred to as a horn coral because of its shape. It once would have sat, pointed end down, partially imbedded on the sea floor.

Corals first appear in the fossil record in rocks about 500 million years old. The earliest forms are simple cups or cones, like yours, with thin dividers, called septa, radiating in from the outer wall. The coral polyp was an anemone-like soft body that excreted the stony skeleton to which it was attached. The conical skeleton provided protection and support for the polyp; the septa supported folds in its internal structure.

Corals are common fossils in rocks of the Paleozoic era, occurring both as solitary individuals like yours, and as colonial forms in which many individuals lived massed together, forming large "apartment-style" skeletons that contributed to the formation of reefs. Your fossil is probably Ordovician in age, about 450 million years old.

When this coral was alive, what is now North America was situated on the equator, and a shallow tropical sea flooded most of what is now Ontario. At that time there was virtually no life on land—even fish had only just evolved. There was nothing alive with teeth that big.

JANET WADDINGTON, ROM

JANET WADDINGTON

Top: Angel sent a photocopy of her fossil for identification. Bottom left: The tooth of a tyrannosaurid dinosaur from Alberta, in the ROM's collections. Bottom right: Several views of the rugose coral *Streptelasma rusticum* from Manitoulin Island, in the ROM's collections.

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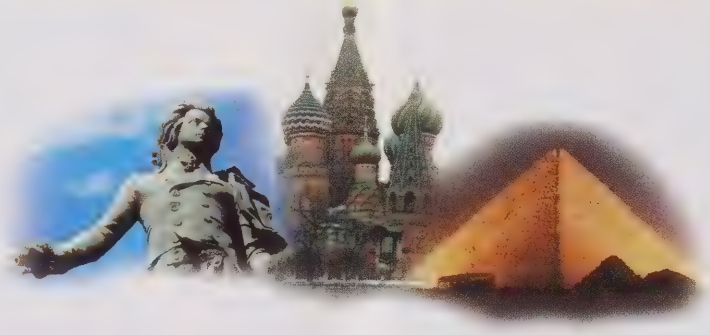

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It is not surprising that you mistook your coral for a dinosaur tooth. The teeth of some meat-eating dinosaurs, as well as other reptiles, can be in the shape of a long pointed cone. There are a few clues, however, that tell us it is not a tooth. First, the coral in cross-section is almost a perfect circle. If you look at the tooth of a meat-eating dinosaur, or therapod, you will see that it is more oval in shape and that it has two serrated ridges used for cutting running along its length. The tooth wall is smooth and uniform, and there are no radiating walls inside.

Is it possible to find a dinosaur fossil in Ontario? Along the Moose River in far northern Ontario there are rocks the right age, and they even contain the fossilized remains of plants that could have been a source of dinosaur food. But so far, no one has found any dinosaur remains there, although the ROM has made several expeditions. This may be because the acidic burial conditions that help to preserve plant remains are bad for preserving bones and teeth.

Your fossil has been preserved by a series of lucky breaks. Four-hundred-and-fifty million years ago the coral died and its stony skeleton was buried on the sea floor. The heat and pressure of burial did not destroy it. Hundreds of millions of years later, the overlying rock was weathered away, bringing the sediments near the surface again. During the last Ice Age, slowly moving glaciers scraped across the bedrock and huge quantities of ground-up broken rock were picked up and incorporated into the ice. When the glaciers melted, the clay, sand, gravel, and boulders bound up in the ice were deposited far from the bedrock in which they originated. Your fossil could have been totally destroyed, but it acted like a pebble, just becoming slightly worn in its journey. Finally, it was spotted by you before it could be broken up by frost or buried again in the mud. Maybe it really is a lucky charm.

Janet Waddington is an assistant curator in the ROM's Department of Palaeobiology.

Fancying Tea

In the days of Art Deco, teashops were more popular than speakeasies and everything tea-related gained new attention. A mysterious heirloom bequeathed to our reader was just one of the many stylish tea accoutrements then in popular use.

Top: M.S.'s sugar tongs in silver-plated nickel alloy. Swedish, c. 1910–1939. L. 11 cm. Bottom (left to right): End view shows the top of the push-button; disk to be held by index and middle fingers; marking.

Dear ROM Answers,

My elderly aunt died recently and among the things that came from her estate was this odd tool. It is 11 cm in length and the metal polishes up like silver. When you push a button at the end, three arms at the base extend as though to grasp something. "Made in Sweden" is stamped under the push bottom. Around the top of the push-button is a border of raised lines and x's and on top of a large disk at the middle of the stem are engraved lines that look like a four-petalled rose. My wife and I have been debating about what it is used for. Do you have any idea of its use, age, or origins?

M.S., Scarborough, Ontario

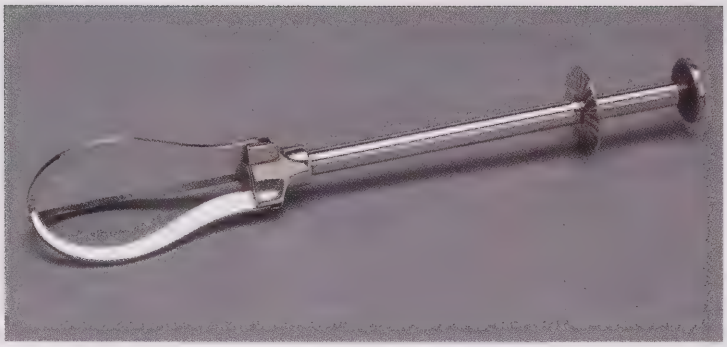
PETER KAELLGREN

Dear M. S.,

Thank you for your letter. Fortunately, I am able to tell you more. You own a model of sugar tongs that was manufactured in Sweden beginning about 1910. In 1996, I saw similar sugar tongs at the Nordiska Museet (Museum of Swedish Cultural History) in Stockholm, where it was part of a display on dining, coffee, and tea in the period around 1900.

The Swedes have always demonstrated a talent for fine metalwork and metal manufacturing. This model in silver-plated nickel alloy was ideally suited for sugar cubes, which came into fashion in the early 1900s. Tongs also came

BRIAN BOYLE, ROM



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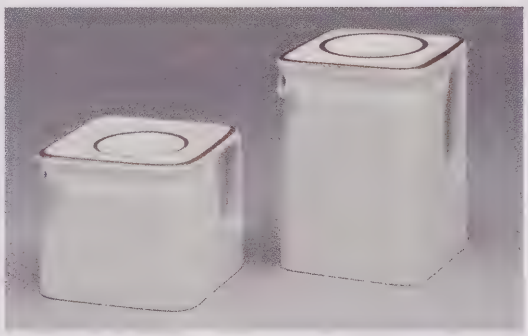


BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 993.150.1 1-2.2

Top: Tongs for ice cubes in silver-plated nickel alloy. Swedish, c. 1910–1939. Impressed "SWEDEN" under the bottom of the push-button. L. 16.4 cm. ROM Collection, gift of Miss Mary de Brisay Campbell. Bottom left: Teapot, hot-water pot, and fitted tray, hard-paste porcelain with hand-painted lustre glaze. Japanese, made for the North American market, c. 1920–1935. Unmarked. H. (teapot) 18.4 cm. ROM Collection, gift of Dr. Irving E. Miller. Bottom right: Coffee pot and teapot, earthenware with gold trim. English, c.1930–1950. Transfer-printed gold mark on bottom: "CUNARD/ MYOTT w/ crown/ STAFFORDSHIRE/ ENGLAND." H. (coffee pot) 12.3 cm. ROM Collection, gift of Mr. Conrad Biernacki and Mr. Brian Musselwhite.

in a larger size for depositing ice cubes into drinks. The ROM owns one of these larger models, which appears to have a history of usage in Canada; the late Miss Mary De Brisay Campbell, a long-time ROM employee, donated it. She or a member of her family apparently bought the tongs in Toronto.

Modern Swedish design attracted a considerable number of consumers outside Sweden. The last issue of *Rotunda* featured an article on Art Deco in the ROM's collections. Innovative Swedish design, best known from Orrefors glass, played an important role in the development of the Art Deco style. You can see some of the key elements of Art Deco in the severe geometric design of your sugar tongs and in the fact that they were industrially produced. The border on the push-button is a series of reeds (i.e., convex bands) bound by ribbons, a motif from Classical Antiquity, another of the sources of the Art Deco style as explained in the V&A exhibition *Art Deco 1910–1939* currently on display at the ROM. The impressed four-petalled rose is more in line with the stylized flowers that were frequently used as ornament during the early (1910–1929) phase of Art Deco.

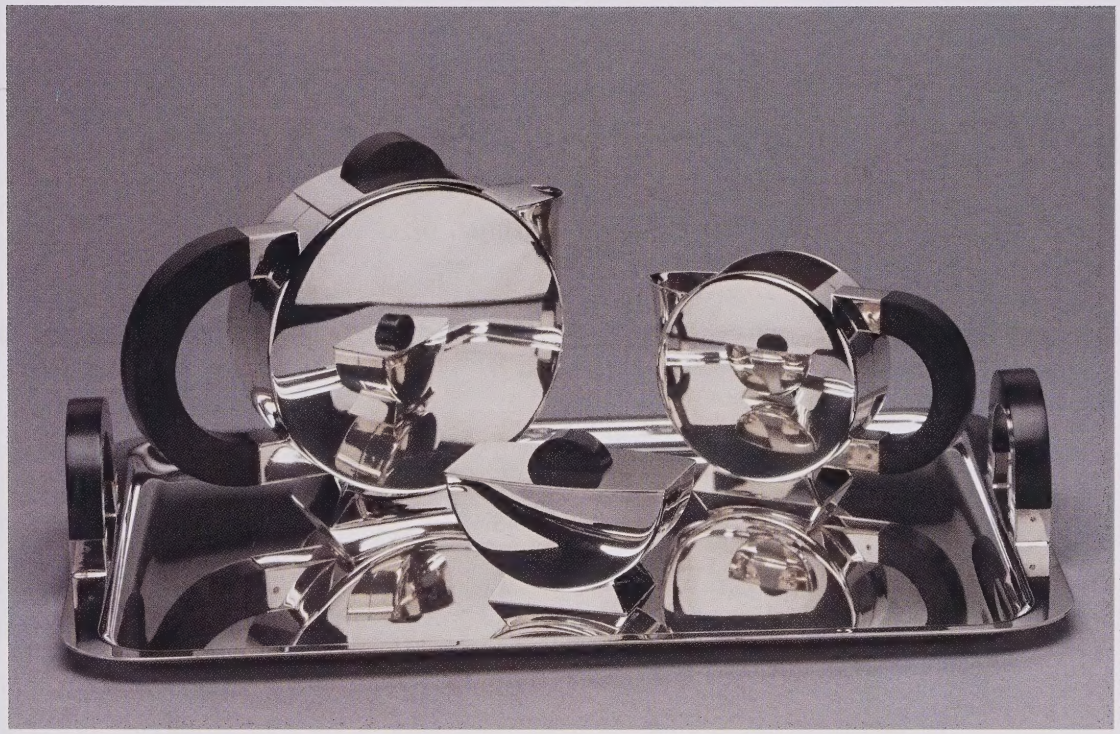
I suspect that this model of tongs was likely in production from about 1910 to 1940. I consider it to be a classic of 20th-century design, much like the single-serving tea-infuser spoons produced by the Bauhaus, c. 1920. Designed to hold enough dry tea leaves for brewing a sin-

WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

If you own furniture, silver, glass, metalwork, ceramics, textiles, or small decorative objects that may have an interesting past and have aroused your curiosity, this column is for you. Send a clear colour photograph (or 35-mm colour slide) of the object against a simple background, providing dimensions, a description, any markings, or any known details of its history to: ROM Answers, c/o *Rotunda* magazine, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C6. Be sure to enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope large enough to include any photos that must be returned to you.

Neither *Rotunda* nor the author nor any other person who may be consulted assumes any legal responsibility for these opinions or their ramifications. No financial appraisals will be offered.

Letters will be acknowledged as staff time permits.



BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 989.181.1.6

This tea service with tray of silver-plated nickel alloy with ebony handles is from Christofle Silversmiths, Paris, "tonnelet" model, designed c. 1933; production 1987. H. (teapot) 17 cm. ROM Collection, gift of Monsieur Albert Bouilhet, president of Christofle Silversmiths. Interestingly enough, Sir Elton John and his Toronto-born partner, David Furnish, offered an identical Christofle tea service with burled yew-wood handles for sale at Sotheby's, London, on September 30, 2003 (Lot 228).

The ROM's Christofle tea service and other pieces are on display in the "Tea for Europeans" case in the Culture and Context section of the north wing of the Samuel European Galleries at the ROM.

gle cup, these implements either had two pierced spoon bowls on a spring-loaded hinge or a pierced bottom receptacle that screwed into a cap on a rod. You swished the spoon around in a cup of boiling water to brew your tea.

Most people think of Art Deco as the age of cocktails. Tea shops, however, were even more popular than speakeasies or nightclubs. In England, the classic venues were the Lyons Tea Houses. In Toronto, it was the Honey Dew. There were many other individual establishments and chains, which had china and silver plate customized for them. Although most tea equipment more or less followed long-established forms, some designers produced innovative pieces influenced by Art Deco. The ROM owns a small earthenware coffee pot and teapot of cube form, for example, produced by Myott of Staffordshire. Myott's was one of the most prolific manufacturers of everyday consumer and institutional table ceramics during the 1930s. This set is of particular interest because it was made for the Cunard Lines, which operated ocean liners such as the *Queen Mary*. These ships played an important role during the Art Deco period; they reflected national pride, and the English and French vied to design the most luxurious, largest, and fastest models.

The ROM owns a "tonnelet" (barrel-shaped) silver-plated tea service produced by the prestigious French firm of Christofle, which supplied silver for the most important French ocean liners of the Art Deco period. The Christofle service is exemplary of plain geometric, advanced "Moderne" design.

But Art Deco design was not always high end. It could also be cheap and cheerful. I was intrigued to see a modest tea set, in silver with black celluloid handles, by Narotamdas Bhau, a silversmith in India, included in *Art Deco 1910–1939*. The set follows the same barrel form as the Christofle set but with *repoussé* reserves on the sides showing two antelopes, an adult and young.

Woolworths and other five-and-dime stores carried large quantities of Art Deco ceramics supplied by Japanese companies like Noritake and Nippon. One such Japanese teapot and hot-water jug on a stand from the ROM collection follows an angular form similar to that of the Myott pieces. The colourful decoration in lustrous glazes is reminiscent of a satin gown from the period.

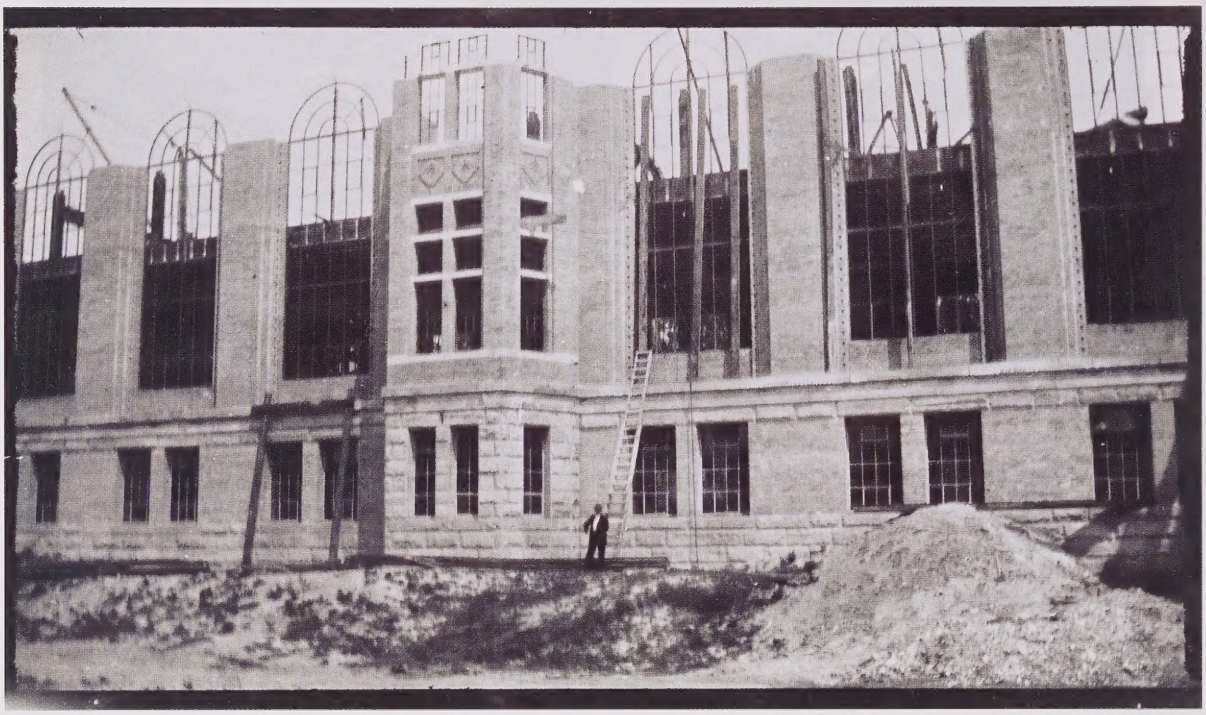
Thank you for sharing your sugar tongs with our readers. Like the best of Art Deco, their design, craftsmanship, and efficiency have enduring aesthetic appeal.

Peter Kaellgren is curator of Decorative Arts in the ROM's Department of Western Art and Culture.

A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

WINDOWS ON THE WORLD

ROM's fine early architecture will again offer views from within.



ROM ARCHIVES

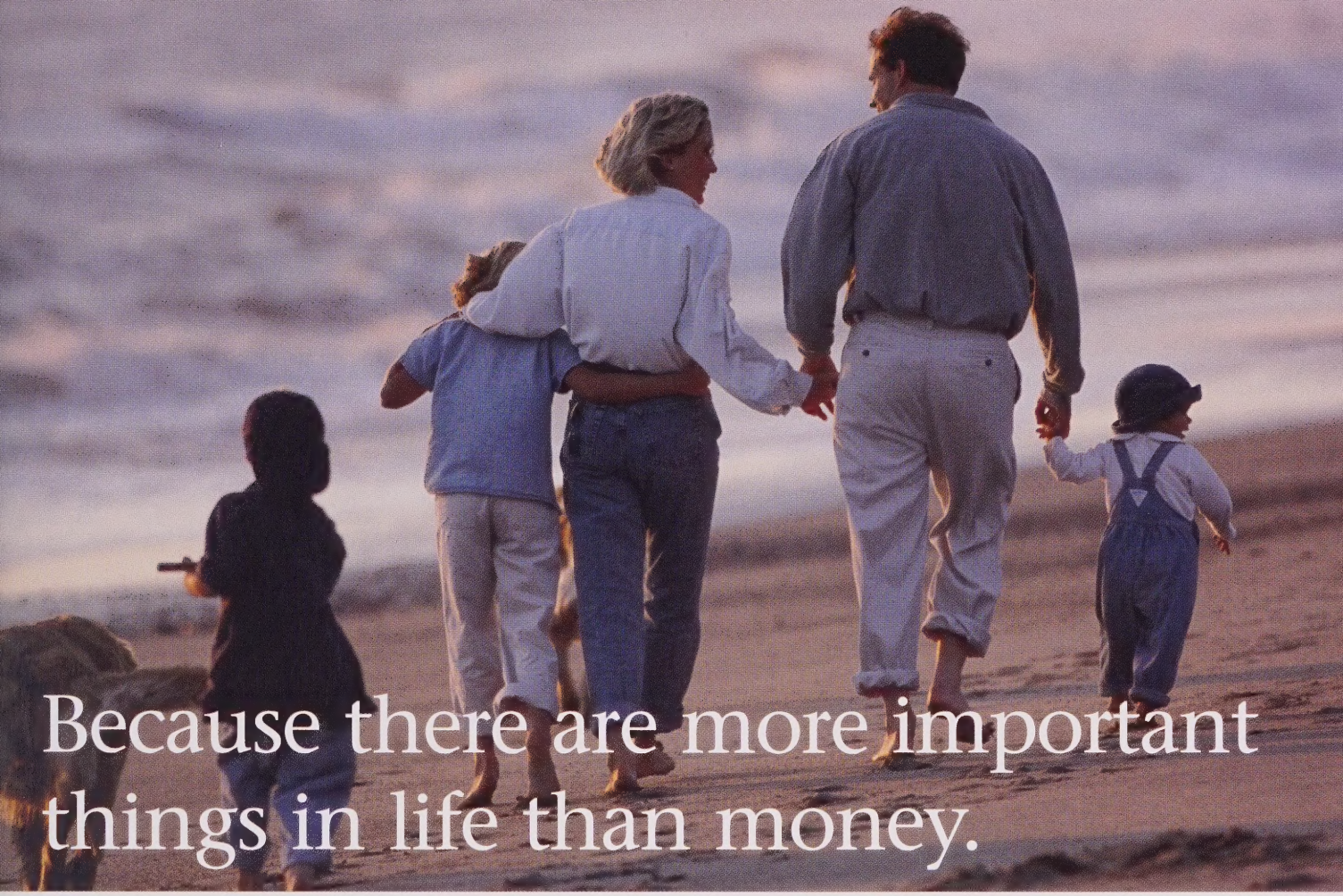
IMAGES OF the ROM's first wing under construction are rare. This view from Philosophers' Walk circa 1912 shows the graceful window forms beginning to take shape. The photograph was collected by Leigh Warren, who for many years was the ROM's staff photographer. Most of the images for this column have been taken from his collection of early photographs.

For many years, the ROM's 1914 windows were hidden from view as part of 20th-century renovations. In pre-electric and early electric times, Museum design demanded lots of windows—buildings were long, high, and narrow to allow the most possible natural light in. In the second half of the 20th century, however, light damage to artifacts made closing off windows seem like a good idea. Electric lighting meant that space could be divided up with internal walls and still be well lit. Now a sense of balance between the two suggests that the "great hall" concept will help visitors make connections across disciplines and bring natural light into public spaces, while light-sensitive artifacts will continue to be protected in special environments.

When Renaissance ROM is completed in December 2005, the ROM's soaring, arched windows will be restored to their original grandeur.

JULIA MATTHEWS

Julia Matthews is head of the ROM's Library and Archives.



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